COUNTER-NARCOTIC STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN: INTERNAL IMPLICATIONS AND EXTERNAL LESSONS

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By

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Opium poppy cultivation, production, trafficking and consumption drastically undermine the post-2001 rebuilding effort of Afghanistan and its international partners. In the context of a tenuous security situation and inherited local conditions, this thesis examines the current U.S.-Afghanistan counter-narcotic strategy in order to analyze its implications for long-term development and democratization. The objective of the research is to gauge whether counter-narcotic policies, both in theory and implementation, are aligned with the mission of establishing a sustainable foundation for Afghanistan’s long-term development goals.

The analysis is advanced in four major sections. First, a development model for state-building and democracy is introduced as a framework for assessing the operational environment for counter-narcotic strategy. The three primary elements of the model are: rule of law, diversified economy and governance. Second, after reviewing the existing state of these institutions, the opium industry and its various stakeholders are observed to understand the scope and fluidity of the drug trade. Third, recent U.S.-Afghanistan policies are studied to gauge the effects of implementation on the development model.
elements. Lastly, an historical case study of Thailand’s counter-narcotic policy towards opium is considered for strategic guidance.

The inherited development environment in Afghanistan, following three decades of conflict and an ongoing insurgency, poses a significant challenge to counter-narcotic activities. Under the current process of implementation, U.S.-Afghanistan counter-narcotic strategy has the potential to compromise the long-term foundation for the rule of law, economic vitality and proper governance. In the absence of strong underlying institutions, the goal of counter-narcotic policies should be to neutralize the impact of opium in a manner that does not risk the long-term foundation for the development model elements. To this end, both strategic and tactical measures are recommended for a revision of U.S.-Afghanistan policy.

Strategically, four overarching principles need to be adopted: physical security is a precondition for counter-narcotic success, there are no silver-bullet solutions, local public opinion is a significant constraint, and the scope of government action must be reconciled with a long-term vision for development and democratization. Tactically, a series of measures are suggested for implementation in the security, economic, governance and legal sectors.
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<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Alternative Livelihoods</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANA</td>
<td>Afghan National Army</td>
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<td>ANP</td>
<td>Afghan National Police</td>
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<td>ASNF</td>
<td>Afghan Special Narcotics Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDR</td>
<td>Demobilization, Disarmament &amp; Reintegration</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEA</td>
<td>Drug Enforcement Agency (U.S.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>Department of Defense (U.S.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOJ</td>
<td>Department of Justice (U.S.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOS</td>
<td>Department of State (U.S.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>INL</td>
<td>International Narcotics &amp; Law Enforcement (U.S. DOS Bureau)</td>
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<td>MCN</td>
<td>Ministry of Counternarcotics (Afghanistan)</td>
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<td>MOI</td>
<td>Ministry of Interior (Afghanistan)</td>
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<td>NDCS</td>
<td>National Drug Control Strategy</td>
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<td>NIU</td>
<td>National Interdiction Unit (Afghanistan)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ONDCP</td>
<td>Office of National Drug Control Policy (U.S.)</td>
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<td>PI</td>
<td>Public Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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<td>UNODC</td>
<td>United Nations Office on Drugs &amp; Crime</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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INTRODUCTION

Six years removed from the 2001 United States invasion of Afghanistan, there are promising signs of development in a nation ravaged by nearly three decades of conflict, destruction and despair. The toppling of the fundamentalist Taliban regime paved the way for presidential elections and the adoption of a national constitution. An elected parliament and independent judiciary further established the commitment to a stable democracy. The institutionalization of a central banking system serves as the cornerstone for future economic progress. Infrastructure and capacity investment in education allows millions of children to return to school, thereby improving fledgling literacy rates. Yet despite these positive indicators, the lofty expectations for measurable and concrete progress remain unfulfilled due to political incapacities and resource constraints. In many instances, the fragmented objectives of external stakeholders within the international community coupled with the inefficient absorption of development aid prolongs underachievement in establishing the viable foundation for a stable, prosperous Afghanistan.

In this context, President Hamid Karzai’s government in Kabul is confronted with a multitude of political, security and economic challenges intertwined with the effort of state rebuilding. Democratization has materialized at a slower than expected pace while tangible reconstruction is visibly lacking in the majority of the country. Security remains transient as insurgents continue to vie for influence in the south and east of the country where tensions are further exacerbated by the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region.
vulnerable to illicit activity and nefarious ambitions. Corruption within the government bureaucracy remains endemic due in large part to a culture of impunity and a hesitant political willingness to address it. Ominously, the inability of government institutions to deliver basic services to the majority of the population compromises Afghan hope for progress. In the midst of these inadequacies, Afghanistan faces one obstacle in particular that bears a unique resonance in the fragile “post-conflict” state rebuilding environment – the opium trade.

Opium poppy cultivation, production and trafficking in Afghanistan strikes at the heart of state rebuilding and development. The drug economy fuels the insurgency in the south and east of the country by profiting anti-government elements tapped into illicit trades.¹ This vast network undermines the rule of law, incubates the corruption of government officials and, not least, strengthens regional criminal networks using Afghanistan as a staging ground for their enterprise. On a human scale, the drug trade fosters a society of impoverished farmers further indebted to manipulative traffickers preying on their desperate circumstances. Villagers and their families are exposed to drug abuse, addiction and its severe health consequences. The drug economy’s far-reaching tentacles poison every facet of Afghan society and its development. How is the Afghan government, in concert with key actors in the international community,

overcoming the menacing grip that the narcotic trade has over sustainable development progress?

In coordination with a U.S. interagency effort, the Afghan government employs a formal counter-narcotic strategy devised to curb the widening influence of the illegal drug trade. As indicated by the magnitude of the trade, counter-narcotic strategy, and its subsequent mandate, weighs heavily on state rebuilding and democratization efforts. Its long-term implications for U.S. assistance, sustainable reconstruction, the citizenry of Afghanistan, government institution and regional relations are imminent. This paper focuses on articulating these ramifications to gain insight into the long-term consequences and practicality of counter-narcotic strategy.

The analysis is presented in the following format. First, the post-conflict environment of Afghanistan is assessed within the framework of a developing democracy. Consideration is given in this section to the historical pretext of the drug trade in Afghanistan. Second, the opium trade’s structure is examined to gain an understanding of its operation and scope. Third, recent U.S.-Afghanistan counter-narcotic strategy measures are analyzed within the previously asserted context of democratization and development. Fourth, a case study analysis of counter-narcotic strategy in Southeast Asia is conducted with an emphasis on realized long-term consequences. Lastly, relevant lessons from both the strategy assessment of long-term implications and the case study are applied to determine the viability of current counter-
narcotic strategy implementation in Afghanistan and propose forward-looking policy recommendations.
CHAPTER ONE
DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

Historical Context, 1979-2001

Although reconstruction in Afghanistan is often discussed in the context of a post-conflict environment, it exhibits few characteristics that would warrant the distinction of being removed from conflict. The ongoing anti-government insurgency and general lawlessness in certain regions across the country is attributable to the effects of a nation struggling to remove itself from the vise of nearly three decades of bitter violence. Its people have witnessed traumatic violence and struggled through brutal bouts of oppression. This is the case regardless of whether it came under the auspices of Marxist, warlord or religious fundamentalist regimes. For the Afghan polity, the psychological aftershock of a harsh environment spares few. For Afghan leaders, the remnants of destruction provide little in the way of a foundation upon which to rebuild society. The legacy of a destabilized Afghanistan obturates Kabul’s ability to nurture principles of democratization and realize sustainable progress for its people. As noted by development scholar John Montgomery, absent the capacity and resolve to administer basic social services and ensure resolute governance, any central government will fail in attaining consistent development progress.¹ This potential for state failure, especially in economic, social and political contexts, incubates the evolving narcotic trade in Afghanistan. To

understand this perspective, it is important to first consider the systematic deterioration of
the country in the two decades prior to the 21st century that weakens the writ of the
government.

Following the December 1979 arrival of foreign troops, a Soviet strategy to
strengthen its own geopolitical interests, Afghanistan was thrust into a vicious cycle of
unrest and violence. Opposition to Soviet influence in the country materialized in a
united collective of resistance fighters bound mainly by religious ties. The mujahideen,²
funded primarily through the U.S. and Saudi Arabia by way of Pakistan, opposed the
Soviet-allied Afghan government.³ A steady flow of weaponry and intelligence siphoned
through Pakistan was met with increased Soviet funding for its allied government in
Kabul. The ensuing war wreaked havoc as Afghanistan became a de facto Cold War
battleground. Major public infrastructure was destroyed by aerial firepower. The
agricultural industry was crippled by the destruction of what limited transportation routes,
irrigation systems and arable farmland existed. From a human cost calculation, over one
million Afghans were killed and another five million displaced as refugees in neighboring
Iran and Pakistan.⁴

² Mujahideen is the Arabic term identifying one who struggles for the Islamic faith.

³ Kurt Lohbeck, Holy War, Unholy Victory: Eyewitness to the CIA’s Secret War in Afghanistan

⁴ Robert Kaplan, Soldiers of God: With the Mujahidin in Afghanistan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin,
1990), 11.
Momentarily dormant during this resistance was the underlying fragmentation within the mujahideen contingency. Once the Soviets were forced to withdraw from the country, however, self-serving interests within the now well-armed mujahideen surfaced and a violent power struggle began by the early 1990s when President Mohammad Najibullah’s government in Kabul collapsed. By 1992, the mujahideen had taken control of Kabul and various regional mujahideen commanders sought influence throughout the country. Ruling fiefdoms with little regard for humanitarian concern, each pursued an agenda of resource and power accumulation. The establishment of black market networks, including those linked into narcotic trafficking, allowed the local warlords to fund their individual campaigns. As “conflict entrepreneurs,” they were able to monopolize violence by acquiring links to global illicit markets and advanced weaponry while recruiting soldiers with such simple offerings as a meal a day.\textsuperscript{5} Vying for control of the country, opposing factions resorted to violent retaliatory measures against each other. Alliances were shrewdly forged one day and sabotaged the next for the sake of personal ambition. In the capital, Kabul, infrastructure and residential communities became caught in the crossfire of infighting. Homes and government buildings became hideouts and bombing targets for a multitude of private militias aligned with individual commanders. The Afghan populace was reintroduced to war and its competing coteries.\textsuperscript{6}


This discord offered Pakistan, seeking to secure its own geopolitical interest, the opportunity to inject a vulnerable Afghanistan with a proxy fundamentalist regime in the guise of the Taliban movement. By 1998, the Taliban controlled the majority of the country.\footnote{Barnett R. Rubin, “Saving Afghanistan,” \textit{Foreign Affairs} 86, no. 1 (January 2007): 64-65.}

The Taliban, students of the Deobandi school of Islam taught in Pakistani religious schools, introduced to Afghanistan the implementation of a conservative interpretation of Islamic law that had yet to hold sway in Afghanistan’s modern history.\footnote{The Deobandi movement gained a following across the Indian subcontinent and is apparent in madrassa (religious school) teachings in Pakistan.} In an apparent paradox, considering their supposed piety, the Taliban took advantage of their inheritance into the opium poppy trade as an avenue for funding. Even though they banned the cultivation of opium poppy in 2000, they nonetheless ignored the trade, creating a loophole through which they saw significant benefit by taxing existing drug cargos. By banning cultivation, they were able to reap unprecedented profits as demand and prices surged for stockpiled poppy under their control.\footnote{U.S. Department of State INL, \textit{2001 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report} (Washington, DC, 2001), vii-5.}

While the drug trade was an especially important instrument for the Taliban’s rule in Afghanistan during the late 1990s, it has been a mainstay for power bases throughout Afghan history. Under King Muhammad Zahir Shah in the mid-twentieth
century, Afghan landowners in the north controlled drug trade and production. While helping illustrate the high-level interests of power in the drug trade, these historical cases offer context for today’s battle to counter narcotics in Afghanistan.

Post-2001 Development

Having reviewed the historical precedent for opium in Afghanistan, we can now examine the state of Afghanistan’s development since 2001. Doing so will allow the discussion of the opium poppy trade (Chapter 2) and subsequent counter-narcotic policy (Chapter 3) to crystallize in revealing the long-term development and democratization implications of government strategy.

The significance of the decades prior to 2001 in Afghanistan cannot be underestimated when examining the current poppy trade and the subsequent policy enacted to curb its impact. The combined forces of weak central government authority, well-armed autonomous local commanders, and economic devastation undermined Afghan resolve and stifled the prospect of sustainable development progress for a nation that could have potentially deterred the permanence of the narcotics trade. More than seven years removed from the toppling of the Taliban following the October 2001 invasion, Afghanistan has taken significant strides towards the mold of state rebuilding that can offer solutions to counter the narcotics trade.

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The formal adoption of a national constitution in 2004, a monitored presidential election the same year, and the formation of a national assembly in 2005 represent significant milestones for progress in development and democracy. While undoubtedly monumental, these achievements are overshadowed by an increasingly volatile security environment as evidenced by the growing resurgence of anti-government forces; increased criminality witnessed in insurgent attacks; internal corruption arising from nepotism and a lack of transparency; and the government’s inability to deliver basic public services consistently across the country. These destabilizing conditions continue to facilitate all features of the opium poppy trade, from cultivation and trafficking to domestic consumption – resulting in Afghanistan’s status as the supplier for 93% of the global opiate market.\textsuperscript{11} Under this circumstance, it is imperative to examine the development environment in which the aforementioned conditions thrive.

It is reasonable to opine that under the current transitional phase, whereby governance institutions are being built and strengthened, conditions are ideal for Afghanistan to be weaned from its dependence on the opium economy. Having undergone several years of reconstruction and state rebuilding, why has there been a failure to consolidate success in countering the narcotics trade through collaborative policy measures? The answer to this question lies in a realistic assessment of the foundation, still in its infancy, built by the democratization processes underway since

\textsuperscript{11} United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), \textit{Afghanistan: Opium Survey 2007} (New York: UN, 2007), iii.
2002. In order to better understand the state of development as a precursor to governance policy, Montgomery’s developmental model for state-building and democracy is employed in assessing the stability of Afghanistan’s foundation. The five elements of the model for the development of a modern democratic state are: a) rule of law, b) diversified economy, c) good governance d) political freedom, and e) universal human rights.\(^\text{12}\) For the counter-narcotic strategy focus of this paper, the first three relevant elements are examined.

**Rule of Law**

The rule of law element of the model is described as “universality of access to courts, compatibility with widespread cultural aspirations, stable and independent institutions for interpretation and application, a professional class of lawyers or accredited advocates, openness to change, and the capacity to enforce observance.”\(^\text{13}\) By this definition, the crux of the rule of law espouses a competent and ethical judicial sector empowering court systems to implement the law while supporting necessary enforcement mechanisms to uphold the law. Unfortunately, a comprehensive rule of law strategy has evaded the scope of development to date.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{12}\) Montgomery and Rondinelli, eds., *Beyond Reconstruction in Afghanistan*, 35.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 35.

It was not until the summer of 2007 at the Rome Conference on the Rule of Law in Afghanistan that a formal declaration of Afghanistan’s commitment to completing a national justice sector strategy and executing broadened rule of law reform was announced. Even so, achieving the rule of law in a national context is difficult given the decentralized power of the government and the tenuous nature of security outside of the capital. According to the statement of a top U.S. intelligence official in 2008, only 30% of the country is under the control of President Karzai’s government.\textsuperscript{15} The lack of government influence in the remaining 70% of the country where local warlords, insurgents and drug traffickers continue to manipulate power vacuums is an especially troubling prospect for progress in the rule of law sector. The integral enforcement actors in the counter-narcotic effort, the police force and judiciary, are faced with stifling odds in this environment where government support often wavers. Thus, the legitimacy of the government is hinged on whether these two institutions, the “eye and arm” of the government, can carry out their prescribed role and exhibit signs of positive reform.\textsuperscript{16}

As part of a lead donor process in which international partner nations sponsored individual development sectors, Germany originated the effort to assist policing reform in 2002. Since then, the United States has emerged as the lead donor for the effort to train, equip and build infrastructure for the police. The U.S. pursues reform in their vision of

\textsuperscript{15} Senate Armed Services Committee, \textit{Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community}, 110th Cong., 2nd sess., 2008.

an Afghan National Police (ANP) force with a broader-scoped mandate in assisting military efforts; a vision that is in stark contrast to the opposing desire for long-term reform and a civil-oriented police force.\textsuperscript{17} The delineated focus translates to a 2,264-man allocation, of the original force commitment of 62,000 national policemen, for counter-narcotics investigation and enforcement.\textsuperscript{18} Though the Interior Ministry, overseer for the ANP, employs additional counter-narcotic task forces, the trained police force is limited in its direct resource commitment to the counter-narcotic effort.

General efforts to reform the policing sector has materialized in limited gains for institutionalizing the government’s rule of law. Though the exact size of the active police force is unattainable, there is hardly any ambiguity regarding its vulnerability. As recent as January 2008, the police force was perceived as a “lightly equipped, marginally trained” lot hampered by corruption and a lack of discipline.\textsuperscript{19} In an institution where accountability remains low and criminal ties high, it is conceivable that police chief posts fetching monthly salaries of $60 are sold for thousands of dollars in opium poppy-growing districts.\textsuperscript{20} These conditions foster a sense of low morale for existing police, discourage potential recruits and negatively sway the public perception of government

\textsuperscript{17} Wadhams and Korb, \textit{The Forgotten Front}, 15.

\textsuperscript{18} Andrew Wilder, \textit{Cops or Robbers? The Struggle to Reform the Afghan National Police} (Kabul: Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007), 13.


\textsuperscript{20} Rubin, “Saving Afghanistan,” 69.
legitimacy. The Afghan National Police currently lacks the capacity to administer the security enforcement needs of the country, or as a corollary, assist in the counter-narcotic effort.

The state of the independent judiciary begs equal attention in the context of developing rule of law institutions. Progress towards the rule of law and gradual democratization is difficult to envision without the existence of competent mechanisms for resolving conflicts, consistent administration of justice, and congruous interpretation of laws. In the context of counter-narcotic initiatives, a functioning judiciary system with well-trained prosecutors, impartial judges and efficient court administration is a necessary tool for success. A 2007 public opinion survey conducted by The Asia Foundation indicated that while Afghans consider the official court system accessible, they remain wary of its effectiveness.\textsuperscript{21} This sentiment is not only a reflection of justice sector reform amidst democratization efforts, but also of the challenge faced in honoring more traditional judicial systems.

The Afghan populace overwhelmingly relies on an informal justice system wherein disputes are resolved by gatherings of local elders; “shura” in Dari, “jirga” in Pashto.\textsuperscript{22} A longstanding tradition, these gatherings are independently conducted to lend


conviction to the judgment of respected elders in local communities. Its independence is further vindicated by the fact that there is no explicit obligation for the councils to take into consideration national laws or popular religious teachings. By contrast, the formal system developed as part of the recent judicial reform process is based on the interplay between civil law and Islamic law. So while the informal process has the potential to compromise the integrity of formal law, the formal model is also not without flaws in its early stages of development.

As in the case of policing, the formal justice sector is equally deficient in its capacity to function effectively. In a human development report on the rule of law, the United Nations Development Program presents a survey concluding that approximately half of the judges polled possess the formal educational training required for their position. Since key judiciary actors do not possess the necessary qualifications to administer their duties, the resulting lack of technical competency compromises the tenability of the court system. Attempting to complement informal systems of justice, which garner greater levels of trust and confidence from Afghans, with a formal judicial process is a daunting task. Regardless, the creation of a legitimate rule of law element in Afghanistan’s development experiment remains contingent upon a functional working relationship between formal and informal judicial models.

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“Although institutional reforms seek to address the legal short-comings to combat narcotics in Afghanistan, neither the agencies mandated with tackling the drug trade, nor the prosecutors’ office nor the judiciary seem able or willing to apprehend and prosecute those who benefit from illegal narcotics.”

Given the critical assessment of the policing and judicial sectors, this prescient statement characterizes the direct impact of a weak rule of law institution on counter-narcotic strategy initiatives. While the weak rule of law fuels the illegal narcotic industry, unstable economic conditions foster the environment in which the country is driven towards dependence on the opium economy.

Diversified Economy

The diversified economy element of the Montgomery model is defined as “a productive economy based on different types of viable enterprises, including ‘private,’ industrial, or commercial organizations that incorporate policies in support of competition, prevailing psychological and social proclivities toward entrepreneurship and innovation, widespread access to credit, regulatory functions to protect consumers and other public stakeholders, restraints on excessive consumption in the public sector, and fluid social networks that give investment and employment opportunities to people with appropriate talents.”

By its definition, the economic element of a democratic state envisions individual pursuit of commercial interests, free-market competition with restrictions limited to the

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26 Montgomery and Rondinelli, eds., Beyond Reconstruction in Afghanistan, 35.
protection of public consumers, and the facilitation of diversified labor. For ordinary citizens, these ideals translate to the state’s encouragement of competitive markets and job opportunity. Unfortunately, the inheritance of limited physical infrastructure, human capital and economic capacity has stunted both business growth and investment potential.

Having been embroiled in several decades of war, the country’s economy was reduced to insignificance. Transportation systems, agricultural assets, educational capacity, health care and public finance structures were passed on in disarray.\(^{27}\) The failure of these vital components has significant consequences for Afghan citizens: without the necessary roads and public infrastructure, it is more difficult to transport goods and services; the combination of deteriorating and unmanageable land makes agricultural commerce a risky endeavor; an illiterate population lacking specialized training is restricted in their choice of labor and commerce pursuits; limited access to health care decreases life expectancy and economic opportunity; the lack of public finance programs restrict monetary controls for cushioning inflation and extending credit; and increasing cronyism and corruptive practices reduce the incentive to produce given the absence of a pure meritocracy.

Considerable rebuilding progress has occasionally been made in these areas. For instance, a recent Afghanistan National Development Strategy report notes the

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completion of nearly 2,000 km of a road network, energy infrastructure improvement, increased school enrollment for children, and greater basic health care coverage among the population.28 Even with the partial reconstruction that has taken place since 2002, transformative economic activity that positively impacts broad cross-sections of the population in a sustainable manner remains fleeting. Given the languid economic environment, substantiated by Afghanistan’s status as the world’s poorest country outside sub-Saharan Africa, it is not surprising that the fruitless pursuit of licit economic activity so often capitulates to engagement in illicit trades stemming from the narcotic industry.

Extenuating circumstances for the non-landowning farming community, including the accumulation of debt, drive them into an opium poppy industry that provides access to credit, wages, land, water and fertilizers.29 In one of the world’s poorest countries, the low cost of illicit activity coupled with income opportunity is more than enough motivation for farmers seeking to provide a means of subsistence for their families. By several estimates, the total export value of opium is between one third and one half the value of the licit economy.30 The limited licit economic activity and growth that may exist is artificially propped up by the influx of foreign aid being funneled into the economy during the ongoing reconstruction and development effort.

28 Ibid., 10.

29 Wadhams and Korb, The Forgotten Front, 42.

The necessary conditions for economic stimulation are currently infirm. Public and private sector financial services, including formal loan systems for entrepreneurs, remain underdeveloped and inaccessible to most Afghans.\textsuperscript{31} As a result, international corporations are better positioned to tap into foreign aid funding. Much of this capital, in the form of salaries paid to international consultants, is redirected out of Afghanistan. This trend contributes to high unemployment levels for the Afghan population and severely hampers the ability to wean the country off of foreign dependence.

Economic diversity and opportunity are prerequisites for the success of counter-narcotic policies aimed at disrupting a trade that helps support a significant segment of the population. A complementary component of economic robustness, governance, is also vital to a stable foundation for policy implementation.

\textbf{Governance}

The governance element of the model is defined as \textquote{\textasciitilde good governance at the national level, incorporating both legislative and administrative units, and including separate systems for lawmaking, interpretation, and execution, the decentralized capacity to deal with local problems, a \textquote{professional} bureaucracy with open careers for civil servants, civilian control of the military, transparency and self-correcting mechanism in both the public and private sectors, arrangements for the devolution or decentralization of authority with protection against capture by local elites, and accountability, including

\textsuperscript{31} Kabul University CPHD, \textit{Afghanistan Human Development Report 2007}, 115.
rotation of leaders through removal and retirement procedures.” This definition envisions an effectual central government supported by independent, yet coexisting, branches. By design, this element favors a meritocracy in civil service, mechanisms for rooting out corruptive behavior, and protections against absolute local autonomy. The related governance element of the Montgomery model is also germane to the case of counter-narcotic strategy because it develops government functionality to facilitate the execution of policies free from corruption, bribery and coercion.

Corruption, the abuse of public office for personal benefit, is rampant in Afghanistan’s national and sub-national governance structure. One of the leading organizations spreading awareness on the issue of global corruption practices, Transparency International, released an annual survey in 2007 that ranks nations by the perceived level of corruption among public officials. Out of 180 countries included in the survey, Afghanistan ranked 172nd overall – indicating extremely high levels of perceived corruption. The data compiled for the survey includes information on bribery incidents, kickbacks in government procurement practices, embezzlement and the strength of anti-corruption mechanisms.

The existence of weak governance exposes policy planning and execution processes to fraudulency and criminality. A system lacking proper accountability

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standards for oversight and sound vetting procedures to root out nepotism and criminality is advantageous to an illicit narcotic industry that relies on such weaknesses for its sustainability. Warlords, the equivalent of local elites, are best positioned to benefit from the consequences of corruptive behavior in governance structures. That these same warlords boasting private militias are implicated as protective guardians of the flourishing narcotic trade is a harrying predicament for counter-narcotic strategy. As one former U.S. military intelligence official in Afghanistan put it, “the background of much of the country’s wealth and elite in the opium trade is problematic and may result in more pervasive corruption as the counternarcotics effort progresses.”

Many of the warlords are strengthened due to their ties with the commanders who assisted in the toppling of the Taliban in late 2001. Having been rewarded with seats in national and local government structures, the unchallenged impunity of these individuals leads to the concession of sound governance principles. Specifically, militia disarmament mechanisms are jeopardized, political interference increases in civil service appointments, turf battles lend to factional fighting, and criminal networks slowly intertwine with governance structures. The inadequacy of one effort to curtail the capabilities of armed militia forces and decrease the power of warlords - Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) - illustrates significant governance concerns that


35 Morgan L. Courtney, In the Balance: Measuring Progress in Afghanistan (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005), 42.
pose a risk to counter-narcotic strategy. The DDR program is too narrowly mandated as it only applies to demobilizing organized Afghan Militia Forces and the disarmament of heavy weapons; leaving untouched the private militias wielded by local warlords and small arms caches across the country.36

Governance issues such as nepotism in civic service, local autonomy that undermines constrains government capabilities, and inadequate anti-corruption mechanisms endanger the long-term foundation for Afghanistan’s development. Civic service programs must take into consideration the overwhelming number of youth in the country that can serve as the future for governance; striking the ideal balance between centralized, provincial and local cooperation should become a pressing goal; and short-term political considerations should be considered secondary in order to pursue a top-down anti-corruption regime. A realistic assessment reveals the exigency of viewing the broader democratization process as a long-term endeavor. Any expectations of a precipitated outcome for a functioning, rebuilt state are unappreciative of circumstance. Most importantly, the development process must not seek to impose upon Afghanistan an expedited blueprint for democratization and development. Instead, the three elements discussed in this chapter represent the general contours for democratization and development; unified, they represent the roots of a long-term foundation. The current

36 Morgan, *A Democracy is Born*, 161. For an overview of the DDR process, see the UN briefing at http://www.undpanb.org/overview/programmesummary.
state of the three elements foreshadows the efficacy of policies to curb the illicit narcotic trade.

The democratization and development process must be guided by the principle that credible institutions for the rule of law, economic opportunity and governance are key indicators of the prospect for the improvement of Afghan lives. Simultaneously, these institutions are necessary conditions for the execution of government policy because they represent the legitimacy of the government’s foundation.

A weak rule of law institution, economic dysfunction and a lack of strong governance do not bode well for Afghanistan’s effort to successfully counter the narcotic trade. In the second chapter, the analysis will shift to examine the opium poppy trade in order to understand how the illicit economy pervades in a weak state.
CHAPTER TWO
THE STAKEHOLDER NEXUS

In chapter one we articulated Afghanistan’s current status as a nation in an infantile stage of democratization and development. Its nascent institutions facilitate a general instability and give rise to illicit activities that undermine progress. Upon initial consideration, the opium poppy trade is a puzzling phenomenon to envisage given its complexities. This chapter examines in further detail the mostly undeterred functioning of the illegal narcotic trade, with a focus on opium poppy. The various actors and their interwoven interests in the trade are exposed. The components of the trade, including cultivation, manufacturing, domestic consumption and trafficking are discussed within this context. Rounding out the scope of the section, the consequences of the trade are assessed as a bridge to understanding the current counter-narcotic policies covered in the third chapter.

What is the scope of the opium trade in terms of participation, cultivation, production and export value? Table 1 provides a summary of these indicators as presented by the UNODC for the years 2004-2008.
What is opium poppy and what makes it a viable crop in Afghanistan? The poppy begins its horticultural cycle when it flowers a few months after the initial fall planting season. The petals of the poppy decompose during the winter months revealing the poppy bulb in the spring. It is from this bulb that the opium gum is extracted through a manual harvest. This labor-intensive process begins with the cutting of ridges into the bulb, allowing a sap to surface. After the sap has dried into a paste form, it is scraped manually from the bulb. This opium gum is the input refined in laboratories to produce opiates such as heroin.

In countries like India and Turkey, poppies are cultivated for licit medicinal purposes and regulated by the governments. However, due to limited market-ready demand for licit opiates and an already saturated market of supplying countries, the majority of Afghanistan’s poppy is destined for the illicit market. What makes the illicit opium poppy an attractive commodity for the stakeholders involved in its trade is its

Table 1. Afghanistan’s Opium Trade, 2004-2008: Cultivation, Production & Export Value

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of households involved</td>
<td>356,000</td>
<td>309,000</td>
<td>448,000</td>
<td>509,000</td>
<td>366,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in cultivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of persons involved in</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultivation</td>
<td>million</td>
<td>million</td>
<td>million</td>
<td>million</td>
<td>million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as a percentage of total</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghan population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivation (hectares)</td>
<td>131,000</td>
<td>104,000</td>
<td>165,000</td>
<td>193,000</td>
<td>157,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as a percentage of global</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential production (megatons)</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>4,100</td>
<td>6,100</td>
<td>8,200</td>
<td>7,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as a percentage of global</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>production</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Export value ($US dollars)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as a percentage of total</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghan GDP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

relative durability. In contrast with other crops like fruits or vegetables, opium does not spoil, can be stored without maintenance, and is able to withstand transportation across Afghanistan’s rugged terrain.

Stakeholders

Farmers & Local Traders

The cultivation of the opium poppy not only requires controllable swathes of land, but also labor productivity. It is no wonder then, that the largest segment of the population involved in the trade is the farming community. Far from being sagacious conspirators operating independently, impoverished farmers are in fact at the mercy of landowners, drug trafficking barons and well-organized illicit trade networks. The 509,000 households involved in opium cultivation received an average of $1,965 in annual gross income. The resulting annual poppy farm-gate value of $1 billion stands in stark comparison to the total $4 billion export value of opiates to neighboring countries.\(^1\) Simply put, by this estimate, 75% of the poppy trade profits do not flow into the farming community. Farmer dependence on the illicit trade is indicative of the limited access to affordable credit, resources and alternative opportunity. Why is there no incentive to cultivate fields of wheat instead of illicit crops? One basic response to this question is the obvious economic rebuttal. The indicative gross income from a hectare of opium, $5,200, is nearly ten times the gross income from a hectare of wheat.\(^2\) Recently, this


\(^2\) Ibid.
trend is diminishing as wheat prices have increased significantly. Yet still, cultivation of opium poppy is often the only feasible way to acquire access to land, immediate credit, equipment, cash advances and a basic level of economic sustenance.

The most prevalent cultivation of opium poppy exists in the southern and southwestern parts of Afghanistan where the government does not wield contiguous control and security is unstable – and perceived as such by the citizens. This area accounts for approximately 80% of total opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. The farmers in these regions, impoverished and with limited education and technical skills, rely on the existence of relatively fertile lands for their means of living. For those farmers who own their land, the incentive to grow opium is an economic one tied to potential income draw and access to credit. Additionally, the opium poppy’s durability simplifies storage and transportation issues. Even the unfavorably high labor intensity associated with opium cultivation is placated by the abundance of inexpensive female and child labor. Those farmers who do not own their own land are subject to the interests of the wealthier landowners and their patrons who are often connected into the opium poppy trade.

For landowners and traders, the profit derived from the poppy trade allows them to incentivize farmers through the extension of credit before the planting season. A

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struggling farmer facing a harsh winter is loath to turn down an arrangement in which cash and resources, farming tools for instance, are advanced in exchange for the future promise to deliver poppy crops. This informal extension credit allows farmers to feed their families, sustain their basic living requirements and purchase the necessary farming equipment and tools – albeit at annualized interest rates topping several hundred percent in some regions. As in any credit system, there is a considerable degree of risk borne by the borrower. For farmers, a less than adequate opium poppy crop yield due to factors ranging from bad weather to counter-narcotic eradication programs implemented by government policy, translates into the prolongation of indebtedness and dependence. The intermediary in this particular illicit economy, the trader, facilitates the cultivation of opium poppy and, by extension, the cycle of indebtedness and dependence. Though mainly driven by the potential for a profit, local traders choose to engage in the poppy business for its intangible benefits also – access to power, reputation and respect.

It is at the level of “trader and above” where the true value of the opium economy is determined, as noted in Dr. Barnett Rubin’s succinct account of the value-chain effect of the opium trade:

The value chain includes transactions at ascending prices. Cultivators sell raw opium at the farm gate, often as repayment of a debt under a futures contract. In recent years, as more processing has taken place in Afghanistan and the risk premium of trafficking has increased, cultivators have received at most 20-30 percent of the gross profits. The rest goes to traffickers, processors, and protectors. The primary traffickers sell raw opium to larger ones or processors at

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4 UNODC, *The Opium Economy in Afghanistan*, 120.

5 Ibid., 128.
opium bazaars. Specialized workshops (the term “laboratory” may conjure a deceptive image of white coats and stainless steel) refine the opium into heroin using precursor chemicals and scientific expertise. Traders consign shipments of the opiates either to individual smugglers, whose families are held accountable for the value in case the smuggler fails to return with the money, or to illegal armed groups, whether political or purely criminal, which transport it across the border. Prices increase exponentially as one ascends the value chain, accounting in part for the increasing share of opiate profits going to traffickers. At each stage of the value chain, power-holders take shares of the profit.6

Farmers shouldering the lion’s share of intensive labor are the vulnerable scapegoats exposed in the opium economy while the traders and traffickers are the largest benefactors of the trade. Consequently, it is this criminal network enterprise, working in concert with regional and global actors, that also stands to lose the most from a stable Afghanistan that could undermine illicit economies. Therefore, the network’s manipulation of the opium trade relies on its ability to undermine the rule of law and institutions for governance. Judging by the conditions allowing the illicit trade to flourish unabated, regional traffickers remain the most successful stakeholders yet in Afghanistan’s narcotic trade.

Traffickers

In order to understand the role of illegal narcotic traffickers in Afghanistan’s opium poppy trade, it is useful to recognize the larger context in which the trade itself operates. The cultivation, processing and trafficking of illegal drugs is a global system fueled by various actors. The trade is dependent on a continuous user demand for illegal

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drugs. The demand for heroin and other opium poppy derivatives in North America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East creates the market for the trade in Afghanistan to endure. The opiates produced using cultivated poppy are trafficked through Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asia, eventually winding up in the hands of local dealers all over the world after multiple exchanges and a significant price premium. The process of trafficking drugs is a lucrative trade due to the calculated risk of capture, punishment and seizure associated with the enforcement of national and international laws. Since the trafficking of illegal opium poppy derivatives is based on exchange beyond the borders of Afghanistan, it is necessary to view the role of traffickers within the context of the regional states facilitating the open market.

Afghanistan is a landlocked nation sharing borders with six countries: Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China. The main transport routes for the opium trade are through Pakistan, Iran and the three Central Asian nations.\(^7\) Given the inchoate state of Afghanistan’s police and military force, strict border control with these countries remains fleeting at best. Border posts lack in the quantity and discipline essential to the disruption of trafficking routes. Additionally, ongoing border disputes amongst the Central Asian states thwart collaborative efforts between national police

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\(^{7}\) U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics & Law Enforcement Affairs, 2008


forces seeking to root out interstate drug activity.\textsuperscript{8} Not only do these conditions facilitate opium poppy trafficking, but they also allow for the import of resources needed to manufacture opium derivatives inside Afghanistan. Local heroin and morphine refinery production laboratories, therefore, become increasingly more common and provide traders with a category of manufactured narcotics fetching premium prices. Given the influx of foreign chemists being recruited from neighboring countries and chemical inputs illegally smuggled into the country, the UNODC’s representative in Kabul estimates that more than two-thirds of the opium in Afghanistan in 2007 was converted into heroin before leaving the country.\textsuperscript{9} Once it is exported from Afghanistan, most of the heroin is shipped through the Pakistani port of Karachi.\textsuperscript{10} The primary transport route through Pakistan is flanked by secondary routes through neighboring countries in the region. Approximately 39\% of the population of Afghanistan is classified as Uzbek, Tajik, or Turkmen.\textsuperscript{11} To a lesser extent, the traditional ethnic ties between these groups and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan may create more fluid interstate trafficking


\textsuperscript{10} Statement by Dr. Bruce Reidel, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution, before a Brookings Institution panel discussion on “The State of Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan,” August 6, 2008.

patterns. Similarly, minority Shi’ia Muslim groups in western Afghanistan maintain historical trading ties with Iran that potentially serve as a basis for trafficking arrangements.

Insurgents

Another stakeholder with interests in the opium poppy trade is the population of insurgents operating in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan. Though a general term, insurgents, for the purpose of the current analysis, refers to those people who are actively engaged in opposition to the internationally-recognized government of Afghanistan. The insurgents employ both violent, e.g. armed resistance to U.S.-led military forces attempting to secure the country, and non-violent, e.g. financial partnership with the Taliban through the drug trade, means in their opposition. They are motivated by a wide range of factors including suspicion of foreign involvement in Afghanistan, ethnic ties to the mostly Pashtun Taliban who were ousted from power following the U.S. invasion, monetary benefit derived from cooperation with the insurgency movement, guarantees of physical security, and the desire for a return to governance by strict interpretation of religious doctrine and law. Though hardly proven to be a homogenous collective, the Taliban movement is a major representative of the insurgent population.

The Taliban is leading the insurgency movement to reclaim the political status it achieved in the late 1990s and recapture Afghanistan in the hopes of reviving their vision of a state governed strictly by a fundamentalist adherence to Islamic law. To that end, they are keen in participating in activities that usurp the power and legitimacy of their
opposition, the democratically elected government and its allies. Through secondary participation in the drug trade, the Taliban insurgency is able to reap financial benefit, propagandize government policies, foster legitimacy with local populations, and undermine the rule of law.

Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown, a scholar with a unique focus on illicit economies and their relationship vis-à-vis insurgent groups, notes the evolution of participation by insurgents in illicit economies for its derived benefits. “Their profits grown as they move from simply taxing the producers (peasants) of the illicit substances, to providing protection and safe airstrips to the traffickers, to taxing precursor agents or the final illegal commodities, to controlling parts of international trafficking routes to getting involved with money exchange and laundering. These profits are used to improve military capabilities by facilitating procurement, to increase salaries paid to soldiers, and to improve logistics.”

The Taliban is no different in this regard. Religious piety during its rise to power in Afghanistan forced the group to issue official declarations banning the consumption of narcotics, however, it considered related activities like production and trafficking as “merely inadvisable.”

A United Nation Security Council resolution passed in 2000 confirms that the Taliban benefited directly through taxation on cultivation of the opium poppy and indirectly through processing and trafficking.


13 Rubin and Sherman, Counter-Narcotics to Stabilize Afghanistan, 18.
activities involved in its trade. Though it has never been entirely dependent on the drug trade as a sole source of financial funding, its scope of involvement remains significant and affords it considerable leverage with local populations.

In order to protect the lucrative narcotic trade, the Taliban has proven to be adept at building relationships with local communities in poppy-growing provinces in the south of the country where it retains considerable influence. In exchange for providing the physical protection of economic livelihoods for poppy farmers against government eradication measures, it develops local legitimacy and grassroots support. As long as the Taliban insurgency retains a degree of public support, it can sow insecurity and thwart most efforts to stabilize the country. Maintaining momentum behind this insurgency is a critical prerequisite to increased criminality and a flourishing drug trade. Due to the lack of transparency in how the Taliban is financed, estimates of the money it receives from the narcotic trade as a percentage of its total funding varies between 10% and 50% based. Though the degree to which it relies on the drug trade can be debated, the Taliban undoubtedly owns a significant stake that enhances its impact on the rule of law.


15 Testimony of Thomas Schweich, Acting Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs: hearing before the House Subcommittee on Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, October 4, 2007.
How do the Taliban and related insurgents manipulate the narcotic trade towards their interests and continue to thrive as an insurgency? Ultimately, by making sure that neither they nor their collaborators are bound by the rule of law. The broader insurgency movement, like the Taliban, has figured out that the most potent way to do so is to marry the interests of its cause with those of weak government institutions. By targeting governance and administrative officials vulnerable to corruption, it undermines government legitimacy and ensures greater leverage. Thus, the Taliban and related insurgents do not monopolize the protection of the poppy trade. Rather, they build relationships with Afghan police, local government administrators, and political leaders alike. The immediate effect of this general disregard for the rule of law is the flagrant display of the government’s inability to assert control. The erosion of government legitimacy, or even the mere public perception of it, is disastrous to the mission of the Afghan government in shoring up support against the insurgency. This notion is clearly not lost on the insurgency. In Figure 1, the various stakeholders depicted represent prime targets of coercion and collusion for the insurgency through the use of payments, pressure and protection.

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16 Rubin and Sherman, *Counter-Narcotics to Stabilize Afghanistan*, 20.
Taking advantage of insecurity, weak governance and vulnerable local populations, the farmers, insurgents and narcotic traffickers in the drug trade make up the contingent of immediate and visible stakeholders. The opium trade rooted in this combined effort produces vast consequences for Afghanistan’s society development. The

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next section briefly cites two of these effects, both with considerable implications for the prospect of human development.

Since most of the opium and heroin derived from Afghanistan is destined for cities across Europe, Asia and North America, domestic consumption of the drug is often overlooked. Considering Afghanistan’s ongoing struggle to improve the health and human security of its population in the wake of decades of conflict, adequate attention should be afforded to this side effect of the narcotic trade. Otherwise, drug abuse could solidify its place on a growing list of inhibitors to human development progress in a country that ranks 174th out of 178 countries on a development index measuring longevity, education and economic performance.\(^\text{18}\)

Drug abuse has the potential to inhibit development in any state. In Afghanistan, it is an even greater hazard to development given the living environment, lack of economic productivity and availability of illegal narcotics. In 2005, the UNODC estimated that there are 920,000 illegal drug users in Afghanistan, of which 50,000 are heroin users and 150,000 are opium users.\(^\text{19}\) Though the total number of users represented less than 4% of the total population at the time, it is nonetheless a severe setback for the human development prospects of a country unable to consistently deliver basic health services, such as drug rehabilitation and treatment, or sufficiently educate its citizens about the transmission of diseases through intravenous drug use. Just as


damaging as the effect on public health is the narcotic trade’s patronage of a criminal culture into Afghan society.

Similar to the notion that corruption fosters the perception of a successful insurgency and serves as substance for propaganda, so too does the drug trade engender public opinion towards the disposition that criminals are untouchable and above the law. Agents of the drug trade towards the top of the hierarchy are known to flaunt their wealth, comforted by the unlikelihood of arrest or prosecution given their relationships with various political alliances and government officials. The paucity of arrests and criminal prosecution for high-level narcotic traffickers has led to the public perception that criminality, especially as it relates to the drug trade, creates its own loophole within Afghan society and governance structures. As the drug trade becomes a larger part of the overall economy, and it has based on the increasing number of Afghans involved in some facet of the trade and its overall percentage of gross domestic product, it has the potential to shed its criminal stigma and legitimize itself as a permanent fixture.

After examining the relationship between the different stakeholders in the drug trade and highlighting the significance of economic opportunity, governance and the rule of law in Afghanistan’s young democracy, we are prepared to detail the counter-narcotic strategies employed in Afghanistan and the subsequent causes and effects. The following chapter takes a close look at how the U.S. and Afghanistan combat the narcotic trade in the context of stated goals and objectives.
CHAPTER THREE
STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

In early 2008, two former U.S. Department of State officials, one a former Assistant Secretary and the other a member of the Secretary’s policy planning staff, published a report measuring state weakness in the developing world. The report indexes a list of 141 developing countries based on performance in economic, political, security and social welfare sectors. The resulting state weakness index identifies the relative standing of these countries, all of which share in common the lack of “essential capacity and/or will to fulfill four sets of critical government responsibilities: fostering an environment conducive to sustainable and equitable growth; establishing and maintaining legitimate, transparent, and accountable political institutions; securing their populations from violent conflict and controlling their territory; and meeting the basic human needs of their population.”¹ The index ranking, determined by analyzing open-source data from The World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Freedom House, United Nations and other non-governmental organizations, designates Afghanistan as the second-weakest state –trailing only Somalia.² This distinction reinforces the case of a pervasively unstable state in Afghanistan articulated in the first chapter. Keeping in mind this working environment and the scope of the opium trade previously observed, we arrive at

² Ibid., 10.
a critical question: what is the strategy, doctrine or set of principles guiding the effort to counter the drug trade and therefore diminish its negative impact on long-term development in Afghanistan?

U.S. & Afghan Approach

Afghanistan’s Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN), with assistance from the Ministries of Interior & Justice, is the government institution tasked with coordination, policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation of counter-narcotic activity. Its steering doctrine, the National Drug Control Strategy, states that the mission of government policy is to “secure a sustainable decrease in cultivation, production, trafficking and consumption of illicit drugs with a view to complete and sustainable elimination.”3 This overarching goal is supplemented by four key priorities: disrupting the trade by targeting traffickers and their surrogates, providing opportunities for alternative rural livelihoods, reducing the demand for illegal drugs while rehabilitating its users and developing institutions at the national and provincial level to facilitate the implementation of counter-narcotic strategy.4 The implementation of government activities towards these four priorities is clarified through the eight pillars shown in Figure 2.


4 Ibid., 18.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Awareness</th>
<th>International &amp; Regional Cooperation</th>
<th>Alternative Livelihoods</th>
<th>Demand Reduction</th>
<th>Law Enforcement</th>
<th>Criminal Justice</th>
<th>Eradication</th>
<th>Institution Building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inform, educate, deter and dissuade the population from involvements in the illicit drugs trade, cultivation of opium and abuse of opiates.</td>
<td>Improve International and Regional Cooperation to disrupt the flow of illicit drugs and pre-cursor materials across borders.</td>
<td>Strengthen and diversify alternative livelihoods that free farmers and other rural workers from dependence on opium cultivation and encourages growth of the licit economy.</td>
<td>Reduce Afghan demand for drugs and offer addicts treatment.</td>
<td>Establish institutional capacity to increase drug trafficking risk through law enforcement.</td>
<td>Establish an effective criminal justice system that can support drug law enforcement.</td>
<td>Build the capacity to conduct targeted and verified eradication where there is access to alternative livelihoods.</td>
<td>Build CN institutions that provide for effective governance at the center and in the provinces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Adapted eight-pillar strategy from Afghan NDCS.\(^5\)

The U.S., a lead counter-narcotic collaborator alongside the Afghan government, provides critical training, implementation resources and funding support for the eight pillar strategy. Official U.S. commitment to Afghanistan is mandated through an interagency directive. The executive branch’s Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) sets U.S. counter-narcotic policy for Afghanistan, with the National Security Council in charge of issue coordination and the State Department’s Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) executing the implementation activities. In this context, the U.S. State Department (DOS) works directly with key agencies and government organizations to leverage their expertise: the Department of Defense (DOD) provides equipment, airlift, heavy arms support and

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Afghan law enforcement personnel salaries related to police training and assistance programs; the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) helps build the law enforcement institutions that penetrate the command and control structures of narcotic trafficking organizations; the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) coordinates and funds the program to create alternative economic livelihoods for poppy farmers; and the Department of Justice (DOJ) works with DEA, DOD and DOS in developing counter-narcotic capability, border forces and the judicial system.  

This robust funding and program support system is predicated on a five-pillar strategy that overlaps the Afghan government’s strategy. The U.S. five pillar strategy incorporates: 1) public information, 2) alternative development, 3) eradication, 4) interdiction and law enforcement, and 5) justice reform. Though the U.S. government supports and funds all eight of Afghanistan’s eight pillars, its primary focus is on the pillars listed above with less emphasis on demand reduction, institution building and international and regional cooperation. In 2007, the State Department’s Coordinator for Counternarcotics and Justice Reform in Afghanistan Thomas Schweich, also Acting Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, presented an updated U.S. strategy underscoring the five pillars with three primary objectives:


7 Ibid., 19.
• To increase the scope of incentives, mainly general development assistance and a reward-based program for provincial cooperation, and disincentives, including interdiction, eradication and law enforcement

• To improve coordination of counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency information-sharing and operations amongst NATO allies

• To engage all stakeholders, including the Afghan government, U.S. allies, international civilian groups and military organizations, in developing consistency and sustaining the political will for counter-narcotic efforts; this goal includes the exploration of collaborative strategies to appoint and support officials committed to legitimizing the rule of law and deterring corruptive behavior.  

In the following section, we will briefly review the allocation and principal source of funding for the general counter-narcotic strategies outlined above, and then proceed to an analysis of the primary pillars of the U.S.-Afghan approach.

Funding

Bearing in mind Afghanistan’s economic development status and unreliable revenue base for funding government expenditures, counter-narcotic strategy programs are financed through the disbursement of development aid by international community

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8 Testimony of Thomas Schweich, Acting Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs: hearing before the House Subcommittee on Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, October 4, 2007.
donors, particularly the U.S. and U.K. Between 2001 and 2006, the U.S. contribution to Afghan counter-narcotic programs totaled approximately $1.6 billion. Figure 3 illustrates the interagency budget during this time period.

Figure 3. U.S. Government Counter-Narcotic Funding for Afghanistan ($ in millions)\textsuperscript{9}

Since then, the U.S. has asserted its willingness to sustain funding for counter-narcotic programs. In February of 2008, the ONDCP released a fiscal year 2009 budget allocating $336 million for counter-narcotics through DOS and USAID.\textsuperscript{10} In addition, at the International Conference for Support of Afghanistan held in Paris in June 2008, First

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\hline
Annual Total & $37.89 & $42.29 & $175.35 & $925.62 & $419.80 \\
\hline
US Agency for International Development & $9.99 & $14.29 & $53.55 & $344.19 & $120.00 \\
\hline
Department of Justice (DEA) & $-$ & $-$ & $-$ & $7.65 & $17.60 \\
\hline
Department of Defense & $-$ & $-$ & $71.80 & $224.50 & $108.05 \\
\hline
Department of State & $27.90 & $28.00 & $50.00 & $349.28 & $174.15 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}


\textsuperscript{10} ONDCP, 2008 National Drug Control Strategy, 5.
Lady Laura Bush pledged $10.2 billion over the next two years for security and reconstruction\(^1\) – of which $1.02 billion is dedicated for support of counter-narcotic programs in Afghanistan.\(^2\) These funds, intended for projects and programs in support of the collaborative U.S.-Afghan counter-narcotic strategy and channeled through governmental agencies, nongovernmental organizations and private contractors, implement the strategy pillars by priority. To put the prioritization of pillars in perspective, the fiscal year 2008 budget for DOS and AID counter-narcotic programs is $326 million – of which 94% is allocated exclusively for eradication and alternative livelihood measures.\(^3\)

What is important to acknowledge is that for each one of the pillars of counter-narcotic strategy between U.S. and Afghan policy, especially the dominant eradication and alternative livelihood programs, there are significant challenges to overcome and questions to be raised if the collaborative effort is to be successful in implementation. For instance, in public awareness, is the government’s message able to reach out to and maintain a presence in the provinces rife with drug trade activity? Will it trump the propaganda churned out by the anti-government insurgency?

\(^{1}\) Statement by Henrietta Fore, Administrator, United States Agency for International Development, before Department of State press briefing, June 18, 2008.


In *international and regional cooperation*, are border disputes impacting regional interdiction efforts? Is cooperation being sought out on restricting precursor flows of external funding and drug processing chemicals?

In *alternative livelihoods*, are licit economic opportunities perceived to be long-term solutions or short-term fixes? Does increased economic assistance lead to a decrease in poppy cultivation? Do non-poppy cultivating provinces receive adequate attention and resources towards the stimulation of economic opportunity?

In *demand reduction*, is there capacity for gathering information on drug use and creating specialized rehabilitation programs to manage potential health concerns? Is intravenous opiate use leading to deteriorating health standards and giving rise to related epidemics?

In *interdiction/law enforcement*, how well do various policing actors coordinate their efforts and inoculate their organizations from corruption? Are U.S. interagency efforts balancing field operations with the essential task of training indigenous law enforcement for long-term sustainability?

In *criminal justice*, what ensures the integrity of the courts and the broader judicial process? With no existing extradition treaty vis-à-vis the U.S., can Afghanistan’s court system effectively prosecute key drug traffickers in an environment where illicit economy actors are capable of exercising unchecked influence?

In *eradication*, what are the potential blowback effects from destroying poppy fields? Does eradication deter the actors that stand to gain the most from the poppy
trade? Is a quantitative measure, such as the amount of poppy eradicated, the ideal benchmark to gauge the success or failure of counter-narcotic strategy?

In *institution building*, how does Afghanistan’s historically decentralized governance structure affect the implementation of a national strategy? Are there bureaucratic mechanisms, including audit and transparent oversight, that detect and expose corruption?

In order to address the issues related to the assessment of counter-narcotic strategy pillars, we return to Montgomery’s developmental model for state-building and democracy from the first chapter. Our examination of three particular elements from this model – the rule of law, a diversified economy and good governance – conveyed the conclusion of a weak and still dysfunctional state. These elements, necessary conditions for state stability and development, are critical to the successful execution of the policies developed by the state apparatus and its coalition partners. Hence, government actions must remain cognizant of the reality that a functioning state does not yet exist, and ideally, undertake policies only when they run parallel to the establishment of security. Over time, it is this environment of security that will foster the development of the model elements organically. At a minimum, the government and its collaborators must be wary of attempting to implement policies that have the potential to undermine security and the development of the elements.

Accepting the assumption that the vision for Afghanistan’s future is that of long-term development and democratization, the aforementioned elements will be applied as a
framework for analyzing each of the counter-narcotic strategy pillars introduced in this chapter. Through this theoretical application, we hope to discern if the current counter-narcotic approach coincides with, and creates the conditions for, the long-term development of the rule of law, economic diversification and legitimate governance.

Analysis

In a hypothetical Afghanistan that is not confronted with an anti-government insurgency and exhibits the ideal blend of a fluid rule of law system, diverse economic opportunity and accountable governance, the implementation of each pillar for counter-narcotic strategy is simply a matter of allocating resources and executing strategy. Unfortunately, as this is not the operational reality and resources are finite, the pillars are compromised either by funding shortages, operational incapacity, short-term planning, inefficient coordination or a combination of these variables. To be sure, there have been relative signs of progress in recent times. As noted in UNODC’s annual opium survey for Afghanistan, total poppy cultivation fell 19% while production declined 6% between 2007 and 2008; the number of provinces not cultivating poppy increased from 13 to 18 (out of 34); and 297 of Afghanistan’s 398 districts were free of poppy cultivation in 2008.14

Paradoxically, Afghanistan retains its de facto monopoly in global opium poppy cultivation and production markets. In this context, progress does not equate to success

in the implementation of the counter-narcotic strategy pillars. In 2006, 2007 and 2008, five provinces in south and southwest Afghanistan cultivated 61%, 78% and 95% of the country’s opium poppy, respectively. This trend indicates that indeed, counter-narcotic measures have reduced cultivation in some areas of the country. Given that overall cultivation in the country has decreased only 5% over that same three-year period, however, it is evident that the majority of cultivation was merely displaced into one geographic area. This part of the country, not coincidently, is also the territory exhibiting the most active engagement of anti-government insurgent forces.

In a report on the security situation in Afghanistan presented to the U.S. Congress in 2008, the DOD attempted to quantify violence inflicted by insurgents throughout Afghanistan’s 34 provinces by way of tracking “kinetic events,” including explosions and direct and indirect fire. Three of the five most kinetically active provinces – Helmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan – are also found in the top five provinces cultivating opium poppy. Though the incidents alone are not the sole indicator of insecurity and a lack of support for the government from the local population, as noted in the DOD report commentary, opium poppy cultivation appears to thrive amidst the insecurity bred by insurgency. Insecurity, a defining obstacle to the development of the Montgomery model

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15 Ibid., 6-7.

elements, is a recurring theme underlying the implementation environment for counter-
narcotic strategy.

Insecurity in Helmand province, the lead cultivator of poppy over the past several
years, was cited by a senior U.S. government official in 2007 as the reason that the public
awareness and information campaign pillar (PI) was not deployed in the province until
late that year. Since security has yet to take consistent form in Helmand, the impact of
PI may not materialize for some time. Facilitating the flow of information and providing
management and support for government-citizen interaction is paramount to counter-
narcotic efforts. Considering the importance of communicating with local populations
and building rapport between them and government institutions, a discussion of public
awareness campaigning is pertinent.

PI is essentially an informational public relations campaign targeted to educate
farmers, law enforcement professionals, drug users and public officials on the negative
consequences of poppy cultivation and trafficking, government policies against the poppy
trade, legislation prohibiting involvement in the illicit trade and alternatives to poppy
cultivation. For instance, when Afghan religious leaders issued a decree declaring poppy
cultivation to be against Islamic law or the government officially banned opium

\[\text{Testimony of Thomas Schweich, Acting Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law}
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Enforcement Affairs: hearing before the House Subcommittee on Middle East and South Asia of the
Committee on Foreign Affairs, October 4, 2007.
cultivation, production, trafficking and drug use, the activities involved in disseminating this information fell under the auspices of the public awareness pillar.

For a country with large rural populations, low literacy rates and limited access to electricity, much less widely accessible mediums for instant communication, delivering information to people is no elementary task. The physical distribution of written material and visual aids is undertaken where possible. Equally important to what information is being disseminated, is how the information is received. Insurgent groups are generally masters of propaganda partly because of their dependence on attaining pockets of local support. In Afghanistan, the Taliban and co-opted insurgents have infiltrated individual communities, persuading and intimidating farmers while acknowledging that Afghans in rural villages rely a great deal on their local religious leaders and tribal elders for spiritual and practical guidance. To counter the insurgents’ approach, any centralized PI campaign requires some degree of coordination with these local leaders in order to gain traction for counter-narcotic interests.

U.S.-Afghan collaboration has demonstrated its adaptability to this particular understanding by virtue of the evolution in traditional communication to include information campaigns focused on connecting with communities “tribe by tribe, village by village, shura by shura,” and engaging religious leaders.\(^{18}\) The pre-planting season PI campaign across 18 provinces is structured to emphasize alternatives to cultivation and the societal impact of the drug trade by identifying individual motivation of farmers’

\(^{18}\) Ibid.
behavior, then personalizing provincial campaigns to tailor to local conditions. Yet despite innovative methods of planning and communication, the overarching message often competes with, or is completely drowned out by, anti-government rhetoric in the insecure southern provinces cultivating the largest amounts of opium. Even in instances where the message is able to penetrate into the communities, the government must overcome the dilemma of hypocrisy. To much of the population, the government is perceived as preaching counter-narcotics all the while neglecting to address the pervasive corruption within its own ranks that allows the drug trade to carry on unabated.

Unfortunately, that the government might mean well but simply lacks the political capacity or resources to stamp out corruption is of little relevance on the formulation of public opinion. Ultimately, in the minds of the people, tainted governance will undercut the credibility of even the most robust information campaign. In addition to local vulnerabilities, unfavorably proportioned funding, counter-information threats and technical management issues also hamper PI.

In 2007, the Inspectors General of the U.S. DOD and DOS commissioned an interagency assessment of the counter-narcotics program for Afghanistan. Their report made the following observations concerning PI: the lack of security makes it difficult for non-Afghan personnel to communicate directly with farmers and local leaders; key counter-narcotics task force personnel responsible for the public information portfolio

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within the U.S. embassy in Kabul are not represented at weekly communication working groups chaired by the Afghan education minister; there is potential double-billing and redundancy amongst the contractors and subcontractors handling public information programs; there is inadequate interface between the provincial public information teams sponsored by the U.S. embassy and the U.S. military’s information officers in the field; and contracts written for public information program support with private contractors are vaguely constructed and lack proper metrics.20

Absent proper oversight and accountability mechanisms, public information campaigns lack the efficiency necessary to credibly dissuade the population from collusion in the narcotic trade. Even increased interagency coordination, unlimited funding and resource capacity for the public information pillar would hardly fill a void created by insecurity and corrupt governance. Further, only a mutual trust between government institutions and citizens built on integrity will facilitate a two-way flow in information that convinces local populations that it is in their interest, and in the interests of their country, to abandon involvement in the poppy trade. The incentive to do so – access to alternative and licit economic livelihoods – is the focus of another major pillar in U.S.-Afghan strategy.

The alternative livelihoods (AL) pillar supported primarily through USAID funding is intended to create licit economic opportunities as alternatives to poppy

cultivation. Annual AL campaign expenditures between $120 and $150 million cover a range of activities including “short-term cash-for-work projects, comprehensive agricultural and business development projects, and high-visibility programs.” The economic and rural development projects spawned through this pillar are targeted at the provinces cultivating the greatest quantity of poppy. Similarly, the cash-for-work projects infuse income into targeted communities where poppy is being destroyed through the eradication pillar implemented in poppy-cultivating provinces.

Thus, alternative livelihoods and eradication are conceived in strategy to be complementary and mutually reinforcing approaches aimed at reducing poppy cultivation. In theory, the intentional vacuum created by eradication is filled by AL funding aimed at sustaining income levels, creating economic opportunity and discouraging the farming population from returning to poppy cultivation. A joint DOD-DOS inspectors general interagency assessment, however, notes that there is scant evidence supporting the notion that AL program funding correlates to a reduction in poppy cultivation. To the contrary, the report uses the case of Helmand province to illustrate that eradication combined with subsequent annual increases in AL program funding has led to year-over-year increases in the amount of poppy cultivated in that province. This could be one indication that AL projects, including temporary

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22 U.S. Departments of State and Defense, “Interagency Assessment of the Counternarcotics Program in Afghanistan,” 36.

23 Ibid., 36.
infrastructure construction and rehabilitation projects, do not necessarily provide the long-term incentive for farmers to decisively abandon poppy cultivation. The fickle wages from short-term livelihood programs engineer volatile circumstances for the most vulnerable farming groups. Those without the means to service their debts, with limited access to additional credit and removed from market infrastructure for alternative crops are likely to see the eradication-alternative livelihoods coupling as more stick, and less carrot. Further complicating the analysis of AL is the reliance on quantitative benchmarks for counter-narcotic strategy assessment that arguably have limited contextual value in comprehending local conditions. For instance, USAID publicizes that its alternative livelihood cash-for-work programs have paid out $19.6 million in salaries to 214,000 farmers.\(^\text{24}\) While demonstrating the breadth of the program, there is little understanding behind the surface figure in regards to whether or not those salaries contributed to making a long-term impact on conditions related to poverty or future engagement in the poppy trade. A consultant working for one of USAID’s private sector implementation partners in Helmand recounted it as such:

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\text{…we knew roughly how many people we had paid, but not how many people we had helped. We hadn’t been systematically asking our thousands of workers about their needs – their land, their assets, their debts – so we didn’t know whether we were meeting those needs. That would have been an enormous task, and we didn’t have the time or the staff to do it. We didn’t know if we were helping the people whose need was greatest. We didn’t know what effect we were having on Helmand’s labor market, or opium market. We knew the number}
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that mattered – two and a half million work days – and that’s what we had charged toward.  

Just as is the case in determining the effectiveness of the PI pillar, this account drives to the heart of the importance of public perception to AL activities. Ultimately, farmers will evaluate alternative livelihood programs on an individual basis. Every farmer or similar actor draws on their experiences, conditions and motivations in order to determine whether or not it serves and caters to their long-term interests.

If in fact economic independence and opportunity is the long-term goal for those engaged in poppy cultivation, the notion that investment in sustainable alternative livelihoods is a necessary precondition for successful and lasting eradication campaigns, voluntary or involuntary, should be taken into consideration.

In examining the implementation of the AL pillar it is worthwhile to examine not only the timing and scope of its activities, but also its target benefactors. In chapter two, we found that the farm-gate value of opium poppy, a measure of income received during the cultivation stage of the trade by farmers and laborers, amounted to approximately 25% of the total export value. Subsequently, the remaining three-quarters of the value of the overall trade sustains the livelihood of various other stakeholders; some of whom we discussed in the chapter. Here, we review a succinct summary of the gamut of actors involved in the opium trade:

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• **Farmers**: Varied in their motivations for cultivating, access to resources and relative poverty levels.

• **Rural laborers**: Typically poor, seasonal workers in demand due to labor-intensive poppy cultivation process.

• **Small traders**: Buy and sell limited quantities on farms and in small local marketplaces; a limited number take part in long-distance trade.

• **Wholesalers**: Trade large volume; organize processing, sometimes overlap with border-smugglers.

• **Refiners**: Process raw opium into heroin and other opiates; involved in trading through well-connected sponsorship.

• **Government officials, warlords and commanders, and other local notables**: Solicit bribes and payments at various stages in the trade; provide protection for other actors; possibly connected into large-scale transport and transaction; provide “oversight” for industry.

• **Cross-border smugglers**: ranging from small traders to groups working for large traffickers; maintain family, tribal or ethnic ties across the borders.\(^\text{27}\)

From a long-term development perspective, any attempt to suppress the narcotic trade and create viable opportunities for citizens to engage in licit economies requires the

consideration of all stakeholders involved. In Afghanistan’s case, this is especially significant due to the fact that the majority of the economic benefit derived from the illegal trade does not advance to farmers and low-level traders. The prevailing bottom-up, narrow focus of current alternative livelihoods strategy appears to circumvent the major issue that is the general dearth of economic opportunity. Indeed, Afghanistan’s long-term aim for AL is to “free farmers and other rural workers”\textsuperscript{28} when it may be appropriate to address the activities of other related actors, many of whom operate in provinces outside of those principal poppy-producing provinces receiving the majority of AL program funding.

Inadvertently, the AL pillar “rewards” provinces exhibiting steady year-over-year poppy cultivation (e.g. Helmand) with funds for development while “poppy-free” provinces are deemed successful spawns of counter-narcotic planning and occasionally neglected. The term poppy-free, however, can be misleading. A province that is poppy-free in terms of cultivation, may continue to facilitate trafficking, processing, smuggling and laundering activities related to the trade. Additionally, poppy-free does not translate to drug cultivation-free. Nangarhar province, now considered “poppy-free” is witnessing cannabis cultivation rise in its jurisdiction according to the UNODC. Without structuring long-term alternative livelihood programs to address the creation of incentives for a wider

\textsuperscript{28} Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Counternarcotics, “National Drug Control Strategy,” 40.
range of actors engaged in illicit narcotic trade activity, the crux issue of economic inopportunity remains unburdened.

A recent project within the AL pillar, the Good Performers Initiative, appears to take cautious strides in the right direction. The program advances high-impact development projects to provinces that “achieve or maintain ‘poppy-free’ status, significantly reduce poppy cultivation, or demonstrate exemplary cooperation with national interdiction forces.” 29 A recent $10 million award for Nangahar province was presented ceremoniously for the “recognition of that province’s success in 2008 in eliminating opium poppy cultivation.” 30 The disbursement of such funding no doubt creates goodwill within communities and may encourage a sustainable reduction in cultivation, but whether or not it will have a positive long-term impact on advancing economic livelihoods or if it appreciates the magnitude of the narcotic trade beyond the cultivation aspect remains unclear. Whether credible alternatives have permeated throughout the province will become clear only in the years to come. In the short-term, farmers often depend on coping strategies, including the sale of assets or borrowing for subsistence consumption, before returning to poppy cultivation – a relatively low-cost

29 Testimony of Thomas Schweich, Acting Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs: hearing before the House Subcommittee on Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, October 4, 2007.

reverse transition. Ultimately, it is the farmers who voluntarily decide through their actions whether alternative livelihoods are truly long-term solutions. Without proper monitoring and feedback channels, what may appear to be an alternative livelihood to a government bureaucrat could very well be perceived as a short-term fix to an experienced farmer. Thus, it would be wise to regard so-called success stories, like that of Nangarhar province, with a dose of cautious optimism.

Nangarhar province, lying east of Kabul on the Pakistan border, proved to be a remarkable example as it became free of poppy cultivation for the first time since the UN began tracking cultivation in Afghanistan. Its success, along with the case of Badakshan province which saw a 95% decrease in cultivation, came during a year when eradication was less a factor in reducing cultivation than environmental conditions, strong leadership, effective peer pressure, promotion of rural development and the increasing influence of religious and community leaders. This is not to rule out the potentially useful application of eradication, especially when calibrated for timing and consideration of local conditions. As a central focus of counter-narcotic strategy, with a proportionately abundant allocation of funding, we shift our analysis to the eradication pillar.

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33 Ibid., vii.
Afghanistan’s ultimate long-term goal as it relates to the opium poppy is the complete elimination of the trade, including cultivation, production, trafficking and consumption. In its original national drug control strategy, the year 2010 was explicitly set as a target for the complete eradication of poppy. The most recent version of the strategy produced in 2006 removed this target year and instead articulates a general “long term” goal for elimination.\footnote{Afghanistan Ministry of Counternarcotics, “National Drug Control Strategy,” 8.} This nuanced adjustment signals policymakers’ appreciation for the necessity of a long-term perspective for counter-narcotic strategy. On the U.S. policy side, the ONDCP goal and selected measure of performance for counter-narcotic programs in Afghanistan is reduction of poppy cultivation with the long-term goal of achieving “a poppy-free North between 2005 and 2010 (21 out of 34 provinces).”\footnote{ONDCP, \textit{2008 National Drug Control Strategy}, 141.} The more tenuous and unpredictable southern half of the country, including provinces such as Helmand that exhibit deeply entrenched cultivation economies, is unaccounted for in this short-term benchmark.

Eradication as a pillar of counter-narcotic strategy oscillates between its roles as a risk-inducing agent and a reluctant tool for government policy. In this capacity, it has remained a controversial aspect of counter-narcotic strategy not least because of how it is perceived, whom it affects and how it is measured. Most important for our analysis, its implementation has a tremendous impact on all three of the Montgomery model elements.

\footnotetext[34]{Afghanistan Ministry of Counternarcotics, “National Drug Control Strategy,” 8.}

\footnotetext[35]{ONDCP, \textit{2008 National Drug Control Strategy}, 141.}
First, let us consider how eradication is implemented on the ground. Eradication, the physical destruction of post-plant and pre-harvest crop fields, is undertaken using a dual-track method of governor-led eradication teams and centralized eradication forces. Using land-based machinery and manual methods, eradication is conducted strictly by Afghan forces; while U.S. private contractors and military personnel occasionally serve in supervisory roles.

The centralized arm of eradication was originally created as a 600-officer Afghan force intended to fill a void where localized, governor-led eradication was either unable to perform or required additional assistance. Plagued by its initial “cumbersome size and organizational structure,” it was transitioned by 2005 into four reorganized and retrained air-mobile teams of 150 officers each – half dedicated to security and logistics, and the other half to eradication.36 The governor-led eradication efforts, a delegated approach affording local leaders greater initiative, were viewed as more successful yet still unreliable in terms of reporting accuracy and objectivity. In multiple instances, UNODC surveyors reported that governors exaggerated their eradication claims and large portions of cultivated poppy area were left untouched even after eradication teams reportedly made their sweeps through them.37 These allegations no doubt heighten the perception that there is ample opportunity for the use of coercion, negotiated dealings to avoid


37 Ibid., 32.
eradication enforcement, and bribery to exercise influence over counter-narcotic strategy implementation. To expound on the issue of how eradication is perceived and its subsequent impact, we briefly review the cultivation trends for opium poppy over the period that eradication has been implemented.

Eradication was implemented in earnest during 2004. Since that time, poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has increased 20% nationwide. In the current top poppy-cultivating provinces of Helmand, Kandahar and Farah, the increase over the same period is 253%, 195% and 556%, respectively.\(^{38}\) These figures coincide with our previous assertion that cultivation is now primarily concentrated in conflict-prone areas and that the number of poppy cultivation-free provinces has risen. That is, since eradication has been implemented, poppy cultivation has gone from a nationwide phenomenon to one that is consistently becoming concentrated. Far from eliminating the poppy crop, eradication appears to have internally displaced its cultivation to a handful of provinces in an insecure region of the country. This does not, however, allow us to infer that the narcotic trade as an industry behaves similarly because the mapping of activities beyond cultivation has yet to be programmed, and thus, is considerably more ambiguous.

At its core, eradication is figured into the counter-narcotic calculus as a method of decreasing cultivation and increasing the risk factor for farmers with the intent of deterring them from planting poppies in the future. For Afghanistan, its implementation has not led to either a drastic or steady reduction in cultivation. Rather, it has proven the

cultivation of opium poppy to possess adaptive and nimble qualities as an illicit activity. Sponsored by patrons in government, insurgent groups and regional criminal trafficking networks, cultivation swiftly relocated to an area of the country where insecurity serves as its host. That insecurity in provinces like Helmand has denied the same sanctuary for the development of stable governance, the rule or law or economic opportunity is fundamental to understanding why poppy cultivation in Afghanistan is becoming a fixture of the economy.

In discussing the PI and AL pillars, we noted the importance of their reception by local communities. Given its more aggressive nature, eradication has proven an even greater challenge to managing the perceptions and expectations of the Afghan polity. In theory, the destabilizing brunt of eradicative measures on farming communities should be absorbed and mitigated where alternative livelihoods exist. Where alternative livelihoods do not meet the individual circumstances of individual decision makers, however, there is an irreconcilable discrepancy between what are supposed to be mutually reinforcing counter-narcotic pillars.

The experience of farming families in Helmand province, the source of 66% of total poppy cultivation, is indicative of the impact eradication can have when local considerations are unaccounted for. In 2007, Charney Research conducted a survey in several poppy-cultivating provinces to gauge public opinion concerning eradication programs. In Helmand, one of the questions asked respondents if they knew of farming families who as a result of eradication either, a) suffered hunger or hardship, b) had to
give up children to creditors when they could not pay debts, c) ran away from the province because they could not pay their debts, or d) became more sympathetic to the Taliban. The affirmative responses for the four scenarios were 73%, 25%, 52% and 38%, respectively. Though deeply disturbing, these responses do not necessarily refute eradication in principle. They do raise questions about whether the implementation of eradication is properly synchronized with local conditions and cognizant of individual circumstances. These experiences and the exposure of other locals to them shape public perception regarding the effects of eradication on their communities more than any informational blitz could hope to. By extension, the government, whether at the local, provincial or central level, bears the ultimate responsibility for this perception. Herein lies the dangerous potential for Afghan government authorities to become caught in a vicious cycle that sees its policies undermine its own credibility and capacity to function effectively.

Related blowback effects of eradication present additional challenges for government to manage. For one, what is the long-term impact of the contrast between the dramatic effect of eradication on farmers and the relatively minor setbacks dealt to other actors in the opium poppy industry? Representing approximately a quarter of the share of earnings reaped from the poppy trade, the farming community is at the basis of eradication during the implementation phase. The farmers’ inability to consistently adapt to eradication stands in stark contrast to the ability of some landowners, warlords,

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insurgents and drug barons to inoculate their poppy interests from eradication. As was asserted previously, Afghanistan’s nascent governance structure, untrained civil service core and still-developing institutions are prime targets for graft and corruption. Those with the financial and personal resources at their disposal maintain the flexibility to outmaneuver the impact eradication has on their illicit trade interests. This scenario leaves farmers without long-term alternatives in despair while other actors seek ways to cushion against counter-narcotic efforts and shift their interests into insulated areas outside the writ of government influence.

The long-term implications of this behavioral trend are dire. The potential for a culture of corruption to become ingrained in the foundation of governance and administration greatly increases. In this sense, the undermining effort of non-farming stakeholders to safeguard against eradication confronts the government’s implementation of law enforcement and criminal justice pillars with growing difficulties. Eradication has an equally perverse effect on controlling the monetary supplement available to feed insecurity since “it does not reduce the amount of drug money available to fund insurgency, terrorism, and corruption.”\textsuperscript{40} In many cases, it increases the value of the trade. In purely economic terms, the diminished supply raises the commodity price of opium in certain areas. Alternatively, it has been suggested that due to the relationship between identified global demand for illicit opiates and opium production estimates, there

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 5.
is a surplus of opium being stockpiled. Eradication of existing opium poppy, therefore, increases the potential profitability for the drug traffickers in possession of this reserve supply.

When eradication is conducted under controlled conditions and in concert with equal application of all pillars of counter-narcotic strategy, the severity of these consequences can be softened and total cultivation managed accordingly. As they have currently been implemented amidst insecurity, however, there is a widening gulf susceptible to compromised governance, negative public opinion and economic disparity. These vulnerabilities threaten to retard the long-term development and facilitation of the Montgomery model elements.

What eradication is to the cultivation of opium poppy, interdiction is to the processing and trafficking of opium. Serving as the law enforcement vehicle for counter-narcotic strategy, interdiction includes the elimination of drug processing laboratories, capture of narcotic trafficking organization elements, and the seizure of narcotics and illegally smuggled precursor chemicals necessary for drug production. In addition to overseeing monitoring elements of the eradication program, the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MOI) is responsible for designated counter-narcotic law enforcement forces, including the Counternarcotic Police of Afghanistan (CNPA), the Afghan Special Narcotics Force (ASNF) and the National Interdiction Unit (NIU). Through the DOD

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and DEA, the U.S. government supports funding, training and resource provision for the national police force and interdiction units.\(^42\)

In 2006, the DEA prepared a five-year plan for its operations in Afghanistan. Although two of the major agency goals cited are to develop the capacity of Afghan counterparts and train, advise and mentor the counter-narcotics police, DEA officials recently acknowledged that they focus primarily on their own interdiction operations and dedicate a limited number of resources for training Afghan forces.\(^43\) It is important to point out that the lack of training allocated for Afghan forces appears to be more a consequence of resource constraints than intent or will. An analysis of DEA resource assignment for major illicit narcotic country sources indicates that Afghanistan is allocated proportionally fewer personnel compared to other regions.\(^44\)

This assessment illustrates the difficulty in reconciling short-term result-oriented government policy with a long-term development vision. In assisting the implementation of the interdiction pillar, the DEA undoubtedly provides a tremendous amount of expertise that results in drug seizures, investigations and arrests. It is to be commended on these efforts and achievements. However, without the adequate training of indigenous counter-narcotic forces, it will remain difficult for the DEA to transition the ownership of counter-narcotic law enforcement operation to the Afghan government and will instead

\(^42\) U.S. DOD and DOS, “Interagency Assessment of the Counternarcotics Program in Afghanistan,” 37.

\(^43\) Ibid., 38.

\(^44\) Ibid., 39.
compromise U.S. interests and entrench its personnel in the quagmire well beyond its five-year plan. In the long-term, focusing on independent interdiction efforts at the expense of training local forces builds an inhibiting dependency within the rule of law and governance structure that will institutionalize itself by virtue of habit. For its part, the Afghan government has been unable to pursue the desire for an adequately trained and effective counter-narcotic police force in the short-term due to corruption, bureaucratic mismanagement and a lack of resources throughout the MOI and its subsidiaries. Assessments from both the U.S. government and the UN bear this conclusion out.

In 2008, the UNODC provided the following explanations for the increasingly free flow of illicit narcotics and precursor chemicals used in narcotic production: lack of government border control at the 167 unofficial border crossings; unfamiliarity of police, customs officials and border guards with search and investigation techniques; paucity of narcotic and chemical testing equipment; and low wages and no proper “check-and-balance” system amongst various policing forces.\(^{45}\)

In 2006, U.S. inspectors general from the DOD and DOS concluded that pervasive corruption along with illiterate police force recruits, ineffective officer training programs, low salaries and insecurity were impeding the creation of a professional

Afghan police force.\textsuperscript{46} Since the election of President Hamid Karzai, the political will and resolve to confront corruption within Afghanistan’s governance and rule of law structures has been slow to materialize, especially within the critical backbone for counter-narcotic strategy and law enforcement – the MOI. In addition to delaying the onset of a credible foundation for long-term development and democratization, the limited progress in rooting out corruptive agents within the government squanders the goodwill from foreign aid donors and international coalition engagement in Afghanistan.

The following account is indicative of the scope of corruption and its current fixture within governance structure relationships affecting interdiction:

The small traders who come to the village have to pay the police (or bandits) whom they pass on the road, who pass a share up to their superiors. The police chief of the district may have paid a large bribe to the Ministry of the Interior in Kabul to be appointed to a poppy producing district; he may also have paid a member of parliament or another influential person to introduce him to the right official in Kabul. These officials may also have paid bribes (“political contributions”) to obtain a position where they can make so much money. Running a heroin laboratory requires payments to whoever controls the territory – in most cases a local strongman and a government official or the Taliban. Importing precursors requires bribing border guards (perhaps on both sides of the border) or paying an armed group for a covert escort. Smuggling the opium, morphine, or heroin out of Afghanistan requires access to an airfield or border crossing (controlled by the border police and Ariana Airlines, both of whose employees are reported to make significant income from drug trafficking), the escort of armed groups (Taliban, tribes, commanders), or expensive specialists in packaging such as those who seal heroin inside licit commodities for export. The bureaucratic, military, political, or social superiors of those directly involved in facilitating trafficking claim a right to shares of the resulting tribute, though the

higher the money moves, the less evident is its connection to the flowers whence it originated.\textsuperscript{47}

To follow the maze of stakeholders and vulnerable institutions entangled in the narco-economy allows one to appreciate why counter-narcotic strategies with a bottom-up focus are bound to fail in both near-term and long-run scenarios. Without neutralizing the interests of the most senior level officials benefiting from the narcotic trade, the various pillars of counter-narcotic strategy are themselves countered through trickle-down protection schemes involving corruptive behavior at multiple levels. The longer these relationships are allowed to endure and strengthen in the short-term, the greater the probability that a “narco-economy” will transform into a true “narco-state” and the future for good governance and the rule of law is fundamentally jeopardized.

The fifth major pillar between the U.S. and Afghan counter-narcotic strategies is criminal justice reform. The U.S. government advisory role in the context of this pillar is to support the Afghan government’s ability to arrest, prosecute and extend punishment for narcotic trafficking and related corruption cases. Institutionalization of a criminal justice system that is capable of supporting rule of law legitimacy is ultimately the long-term desire. The Afghan government’s mission in this regard is derived from their constitution’s seventh article calling on the state to prevent “cultivation and smuggling of narcotics, and production and use of intoxicants,”\textsuperscript{48} and the more comprehensive counter-narcotic law drafted and issued in 2005 through collaboration with the DOJ. This law

\textsuperscript{47} Rubin and Sherman, \textit{Counter-Narcotics to Stabilize Afghanistan}, 23.

\textsuperscript{48} Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Constitution, ch. 1, art. 7.
enables Afghan law enforcement agencies to use investigative techniques to debilitate trafficking organizations and creates a centralized tribunal to handle high-profile seizure cases. Interagency assessments have cautiously noted, however, that the capacity of the tribunal to successfully prosecute major traffickers in a local setting has been limited.\(^{49}\)

As was established in the first chapter, the current state of the independent judiciary and criminal justice institution is a work in progress. Most notably, a dearth of qualified personnel and the traditional reliance of citizens on the informal justice sector tempers optimism for immediate success. Indeed, like the other pillars of counter-narcotic strategy, the process of reform through which criminal justice structures secure public confidence, begin to operate within the boundaries of the country’s nascent legal principles, and develop anti-corruption mechanisms is long-term in nature.

Even with a long-term perspective, the criminal justice system is unlikely to gain the traction of legitimacy for counter-narcotic efforts without proving its ability to prosecute mid to high-level narcotic trafficking cases. Serving as one function of the insecurity that lingers in the country, the threat of violence against judges and prosecutors potentially involved with high-profile cases is a major impediment to prosecution.\(^{50}\) While justice reform slowly builds its personnel capacity with qualified and well-trained stakeholders, the potential for corruptive bribery schemes looms ominously over the

\(^{49}\) U.S. DOD and DOS, “Interagency Assessment of the Counternarcotics Program in Afghanistan,” 40.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 41.
implementation of the rule of law. Thus, in the context of the existing capacity for criminal justice, major traffickers and stakeholders in the drug trade operate unperturbed. They maintain full confidence in their ability to exert influence over an inchoate justice system. Further, the nonexistence of a formal extradition treaty between Afghanistan and the U.S. discounts the risk they face in being brought to justice in robust and competent criminal justice systems abroad. Once again, the realized perception, in this case of selective impunity from punishment, grossly undermines government policy measures. The notion that elements within society are beyond the purview of the rule of law is a necessary condition for criminality to be weaved into the permanent fabric of the state. If this sentiment is sustained, a vision for long-term development and democratization will be effectively ceded.

The three remaining pillars of counter-narcotic strategy are demand reduction, institution building and regional and international cooperation. As previously mentioned, these pillars, although included in Afghanistan’s official eight-pillar doctrine, are considered supplementary to the U.S. five-pillar strategy. Our discussion will address these pillars within the context of U.S. government policy.

Demand reduction may not directly relate to the Montgomery model elements, however, it does affect long-term development and democratization from a human development perspective. As we recounted in the second chapter, the last available data collected by the UN on drug use in 2005 acknowledged the existence of nearly 1 million illicit drug users in Afghanistan. Repatriation trends since that year suggest that this
figure may have increased. Afghan refugees returning from Iran, a country with historically high rates of opium addiction per capita, would likely contribute to this increase. The persistence of poppy cultivation and increased processing of heroin within Afghan borders also trends towards increased availability of narcotics for consumption. In order to neutralize these trends and aid in the prevention and reduction of drug use, the U.S. provides relatively limited funding support, technical assistance and training for the Afghan government.

Two major health concerns related to long-term human development standards arise from the secondary status of demand reduction in counter-narcotic strategy. First, the three-year gap in gathering data on domestic drug consumption creates vulnerability in the government and international community’s ability to respond effectively to a long-term health crisis. Second, increasing intravenous drug use could potentially lead to the spread of a severe HIV epidemic. Without recent, identifiable nationwide data representing at-risk communities and local populations, it is difficult to provide the timely medical care necessary to contain any looming health crisis. Within a long-term development paradigm, these human development and health factors are indirectly related to local economic conditions. We will return to this connection during the case study and conclusion.

The regional and international cooperation pillar supports the enlistment of partner states and organizations in collaborative efforts to disrupt the flow of illicit drugs and pre-cursor materials across borders. The success of this pillar within overall strategy
is hinged on gaining assurances of commitment followed by forceful application of the terms of commitment. The assumed pragmatism behind this pillar can be challenged, and rightly so, on the grounds that it is beyond the jurisdiction of immediate political will. In essence, it can invite rhetoric and vague commitment to assistance without measurable indicators. Even so, it does provide two areas of opportunity for long-term development policy advancement: the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and precursor funding and financial source flows. These areas are addressed later in the conclusion.

The final pillar, institution building, is targeted at the creation of counter-narcotic entities that provide effective governance, monitoring and coordination mechanisms at the central and provincial levels. Though with limited direct funding, the capacity building efforts of the institution pillar often overlap larger project areas nestled between other pillars. For example, there is anticipation for increased justice system assistance through this pillar with a focus on enhancing prosecutorial capability. The governance implications of criminal justice structures previously discussed within the context of the justice reform pillar similarly apply to efforts undertaken through the institution building pillar.

The implementation of counter-narcotic strategy towards the destruction of the opium industry has proven to be a challenging task for the U.S. and Afghanistan. Though incremental and isolated advances have been achieved through policy measures, the broader opium trade remains a debilitating, unscathed reminder of the state’s instability.

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From one perspective, that the opium phenomenon carries on largely unbothered appears to be a function of the failure to reconcile the simultaneous effort to suppress an illicit economy through institutions with the attempt to build the foundation of those same nascent institutions. Indeed, this conflicting relationship is evident in the examination of how the various pillars are implemented.

For instance, it is difficult to imagine a successful provincial public awareness campaign conducted by a government that is not perceived to possess unchallenged influence, visibility and legitimacy in the operating province. It is also unlikely that interdiction and criminal prosecution will cripple the largest benefactors of the opium trade, high-level traffickers and warlords, as long as the civil service, political bureaucracy and justice system remain sanctuaries of illicit involvement and vulnerable to systemic corruption. Additionally, the eradication of farmers’ poppy crops with supplemented assistance in cultivating licit agricultural products is an effort handicapped by the lack of infrastructure, economic systems and security necessary to develop the competitive trade of products into a viable long-term livelihood. This pattern of seemingly irreconcilable prerequisites begs the question: is counter-narcotic strategy doomed to fail, absent the preexistence of the functioning Montgomery model elements? This question can be considered through two distinct perspectives.

On the one hand, it can be argued that indeed, counter-narcotic strategy necessarily requires competent legal mechanisms and a healthy economy under the authority of a functional state apparatus as a precondition. On the other hand, the state
cannot simply ignore the narcotic trade, and its social, political and economic costs, in
case to focus on bringing about the ideal requisites. Abandoning the consideration of
narcotics would lend to an exacerbation of the problem and inflict greater long-term
costs. Therefore, out of necessity, there should be some semblance of an effort to combat
the illicit trade. Simply put, taking some action is favorable to taking no action at all.

So then, what is the guiding principle of the action to be taken? Generally,
counter-narcotic strategy should operate in such a way so that it does not undermine long-
term goals for development and democratization. Applied to the case of Afghanistan,
counter-narcotics must be implemented so as not to compromise the foundation for good
governance, economic opportunity and the legitimate rule of law. In the context of
strategy pillars, this implies that: eradication must be perceived as objective, free from
coercive influence and in the long-term economic interest of those most impacted by it;
alternative livelihoods must address the underlying economic conditions afflicting poppy
farmers; interdiction, criminal justice and prosecution must be perceived as equitable and
having jurisdiction over all citizens; and demand reduction must be robust enough to
address the health and social indicators tied closely to economic security. Considering
the analysis in this chapter, there is considerable room for improvement in aligning
counter-narcotics and long-term goals for Afghanistan. Thus far, the implementation of
counter-narcotic strategy pillars has, to varying extents, had negative implications for the
long-term development and democratization goals. Before examining the future of U.S.-
Afghan counter-narcotic strategy in the conclusion, the next chapter presents an historical case study of another opium-cultivating state – Thailand.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE CASE OF THAILAND, 1970-2000

Before we review the case of Thailand’s counter-narcotic strategy case as, it is necessary to begin with an arguably obvious, but nevertheless necessary, disclaimer: no two counter-narcotic policy environments are ever identical. That is, any country that has had to confront a narcotic industry, opium poppy included, deals with its own unique, and often complex, conditions and externalities. This is no less the case when comparing Afghanistan and Thailand. The goal, then, of comparing two separate counter-narcotic strategy cases is to generally draw upon the applied policy frameworks and analyze the learned experiences and environments. With that goal in mind, we will review the case of Thailand not to attempt the inevitably futile task of constructing a blueprint to apply in Afghanistan, but rather to investigate the strategies and tactics involved. Ideally, this examination will uncover broad principles and provide an opportunity to glean any relevant lessons emanating from incidental similarities between the two cases.

In the period after the second world war, Thailand has been one of three countries, along with Laos and Burma, collectively referred to as the Golden Triangle – one of the main sources of illicit poppy cultivation and opium production. The Golden Triangle, a phrase popularized in 1971 by then U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Marshall Green, was the primary source of global poppy cultivation until 2003 and the largest global

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opium-producing region until 1991. Afghanistan became the world’s primary source of cultivation and production, after 2003 and 1991, respectively. What remains of the Golden Triangle’s poppy cultivation and opium production today is concentrated primarily in Burma, with Laos and Thailand having reduced their stake to statistically insignificant levels. What accounts for the diminished opium industry in Thailand? Was it due to government intervention on the part of the Thai government or some inevitable externality? The answer lies somewhere in between the two forces.

Between 1967 and 2000, Thailand’s poppy cultivation reduced from over 18,000 hectares to 300 hectares and its opium production decreased from 145 tons to just under 4 tons. To put this into context, within the Golden Triangle, the scope of the opium industry in Thailand has historically been smaller in size than that of Burma and Laos. This is partly the case due to the greater prevalence of local insurgencies and intermittent conflict episodes in Burma and Laos throughout the decades following the second world war. During this period, a more secure and stable Thailand emerged, taking significant strides toward modernization and economic vitality. This developing environment had a

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3 The only exception in the context of post-1991 production occurred in 2001 when Afghanistan’s opium production fell drastically in light of the Taliban’s ban on poppy cultivation.


6 Ibid., 21.
direct impact on the ethnic minority communities cultivating poppy in the northern highlands of Thailand.

The population in the mountainous highland region was for a long period secluded and isolated from the mainstream Thai population. Akin to a forgotten peoples, they carried on with limited contact vis-à-vis the mainstream Thai and central authorities of the monarch’s rule in Bangkok. The ambiguous relationship between them eventually evolved and matured as the effects of nationwide economic growth began to permeate. Beginning in the 1970s, development introduced the country to large-scale infrastructure projects providing the potential for increased economic opportunities and began to connect urban locales and the more remote communities. These infrastructure projects, including the creation of road networks, dams, and irrigation systems began to reach the mountainous ranges where highland tribes lived. That the growth of infrastructure increased the vulnerability of these communities to enforcement is viewed by some observers as the impetus behind the willingness of farming communities to abandon poppy cultivation.\(^7\) Their decisions may also have been affected by development in the last decade of the twentieth century that included new schools, health facilities, linkages into main market centers, electrification, improved communications technology and tourism.\(^8\) The development of Thailand, especially in the remote poppy-cultivating regions, increased governance, civil interaction and the spread of economic opportunities

\(^7\) Ibid., 42.

\(^8\) Ibid., 111.
during the period 1970-2000. This same thirty-year period also encompassed the Thai government’s official counter-narcotic strategy initiative towards the opium industry in the highlands.

Thailand’s counter-narcotic strategy goal, to replace the poppy crop, was to take thirty years to implement according to King Bhumibol Adulyadej. In retrospect, this estimate turned out to be a fairly accurate one. The Thai experience in counter-narcotic strategy reveals a pattern of incremental advances, consistent reformulation, reframing of the problems and an increasing commitment to engendering a spirit of voluntary local village participation. According to Dr. Ronald Renard, who spent time in the highlands during this period as a researcher and consultant, this “evolution of approaches” to counter-narcotic policy manifested itself in three distinct phases: early crop replacement initiatives in the 1970s; rural integration development between the late 1970s and late 1980s; and participatory alternative development in the 1990s.10

When the first phase of counter-narcotic efforts began in the 1970s, Thai authorities adopted a delicate task. Their historically precarious relationship with the people of the northern highlands had long kept them at a distance from local realities and might have factored into calculations about how to craft a relevant solution. Without a well-informed understanding of the highland minorities and their habits, it was guaranteed that counter-narcotic policies would be a long-term venture. Some of the

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9 Ibid., xiv.

10 Ibid., 69.
early complexities the government faced in attempting to sever the relationship between farmers and poppy are not unlike those facing Afghanistan today. For instance, it is recognized that seasonal poppy cultivation served as a means for farming communities to access credit and immediate cash advances that could not be acquired by planting alternative crops.\textsuperscript{11} These farmers generally earned more cash income relative to other rural Thais, yet they were still relatively poor, possessing limited discretionary income and stagnant standards of living.\textsuperscript{12} Beyond the economic considerations, there were varying security issues confronting the first phase of the effort to combat opium poppy in Thailand.

Thailand’s northern highland region served as a breeding ground for small-scale insurgencies in the 1970s and suffered from regional conflict emanating from its northern border with Burma. At the time, Thai authorities chose to address the insecurity in its north within the context of a greater regional threat – communism. Favoring a “policy of benign neglect” rather than direct confrontation, insurgents and warlords were considered a buffer against the creeping communist insurgencies.\textsuperscript{13} Though these sanctuaries were eventually destroyed after the 1970s, Burma’s insurgency conflict, currently between the ruling military junta and rebel opposition groups, continues to have periodic spillover

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 28.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 32.

effects into Thailand’s northern highlands. Within the constraints of local economic conditions and a conscious decision to disregard a potentially volatile security environment, the first phase of Thailand’s effort focused on donor-driven projects intended to replace poppies with alternative cash crops.

With development of the highlands in its earliest stages and a positive correlation between insecurity and poppy cultivation, the implementation of the first phase was wrought with shortcomings. The simplistic notion of simply replacing poppies with alternative crops without a consolidated effort to address some of the conditions facilitating cultivation exposed a steep learning curve for Thai authorities and collaborating development agencies. The following were among the first phase’s initial challenges: low market prices for alternative crops, damaged alternative crops due to unfamiliarity with new agricultural products, absence of financial credit vehicles, lack of reliable marketing infrastructure for alternative crops and limited transportation routes. Moreover, as it was a donor-driven effort with the singular task of experimenting with alternative agriculture, the government kept counter-narcotics, and those involved, at arm’s length. Moving into the 1980s, the government began to increase the level of initiative it took in counter-narcotics strategy implementation.

Thailand’s second phase of counter-narcotic strategy, an improvement over the first phase, began to lay the foundation that would move toward a comprehensive approach. Beyond crop replacement, it was clear that the government perspective would

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14 Renard, Opium Production in Thailand, 78.
need to alleviate the underlying causes of poppy cultivation and recognize the long-term side effects, such as illicit opium use. In hindsight, the incremental approach is evident in this phase as the government began to engage directly with the farming communities, introducing eradicative elements of strategy where possible and actively exploring the highland community conditions. In seeking to understand the communities they were working in, they took the advice of local anthropologists who asserted that the effectiveness of individual community development projects would be determined by how well they were aligned with farmers’ needs and circumstances.\textsuperscript{15} This focus allowed the government to take a farmer-centric perspective, viewing them as Thai citizens, and not simply the highlands population:

During the integrated rural development projects of the 1980’s, more efforts to bring the hill people within the Thai polity began. Thai government services in health and education entered the hills. Serious efforts to grant hill people citizenship were begun simultaneously with poppy destruction. The government sent the message from 1984 on to the hill people that citizenship could be offered to those abandoning poppy cultivation. Although implementing this proved difficult, from then on, more hill people obtained citizenship and sent their children to Thai schools. The size of the projects and the involvement of many agencies acquainted a large number of Thai officials with the hill people. Although the misconceptions about them persisted in the big cities, people on the ground began to know hill people better than ever before.\textsuperscript{16}

The second phase of Thai policy in the 1980s also witnessed the government’s willingness to address security concerns in the highlands and balance development strategies with aggressive tactics such as eradication. The government began subjugating

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 83.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 117.
insurgents in the north at the beginning of the decade by destroying their sanctuaries.¹⁷ Though this intervention may have assisted in reducing cultivation levels, eradication was also a critical element. For all its effectiveness as a punitive and deterrent measure, eradication did manage to present its own challenges. It initially raised opium prices for the benefit of traffickers while increasing the prevalence of heroin refineries in local farming communities – a factor that contributed to a rise in drug abuse.¹⁸ Recognizing the importance of addressing domestic drug abuse led to the government’s embrace of a holistic approach that sought to elicit reciprocated initiative from farmers in the third phase of counter-narcotic trials.

The inclusion of villagers through the life cycle of the three phases of counter-narcotic strategy is best described by Renard as a methodical transition from acquiescence, to acceptance, and finally, to agreement.¹⁹ An agreeable relationship between villagers and government authorities no doubt created the type of working environment wherein a mutual trust and understanding matured. Under these conditions, locals were empowered to actively engage in the development and counter-narcotic efforts of their communities. This ambition was reflected in a 1988 counter-narcotic strategy declaration. The declaration vowed to channel development through the government agencies within the national administrative structure and conduct planning in


¹⁸ Renard, Opium Production in Thailand, 43.

¹⁹ Ibid., 135.
a decentralized fashion through provinces, districts and local organizations.\textsuperscript{20} This perspective set the tone for the remaking of the highlands that continued into the 1990s and led to the diminishing influence of poppies. The development of localized alternatives was one, and arguably the most important, aspect of Thailand’s effort to strike the appropriate balance in strategy. Its four other primary principles were demand reduction, enforcement, long-term investment and national unity.\textsuperscript{21}

Even still, it is hard to implicate a distinctly causal relationship between alternative development projects targeted to farmers within the counter-narcotic framework and the removal of poppy cultivation in the Thai highlands. Indeed, as we alluded to earlier, the confluence of large-scale development, encroaching nationwide economic infrastructure, access to education, delivery of basic health services, and exposure to larger segments of the Thai community facilitated the transition away from highland dependency on poppy cultivation. Farmers’ economic opportunity, improved standards of living and integration were key contributors to the effectiveness of government policies and the coinciding decrease in poppy cultivation over the years 1970-2000. For this reason, it is not recommended that the government’s counter-narcotic strategy be judged independent of the externalities that surrounded it.

Even so, the Thai government’s strategy is deserving of the recognition that it served as a bridge between the nationwide externalities and the local presence and

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 50.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 118.
commitment necessary to undermine poppy cultivation. The Thai government, for its part, maintained a pliable strategy posture over this period. The evolution of its policymaking reveals a gradual, phased understanding of poppy cultivating farmers and the conditions that lent to their decisions.

Renard identifies seven factors that were instrumental to the long-term viability of the government-sponsored highland programs: 1) public awareness through the sharing of information between stakeholders at all levels, 2) creation of programs that catered to local sentiment, 3) evaluation and trial periods for programs, 4) leadership insistence on inclusive projects with local buy-in, 5) unity in action and political will, 6) long-term commitment and resource allocation, 7) educing voluntary participation on individual terms.22

By itself, this list of factors is not necessarily the sole reason for the apparent success of Thailand’s counter-narcotic strategy over the thirty-year period. It is, however, an insight into a long-term perspective oriented towards addressing vulnerable communities. For all its evident success in reducing poppy cultivation, Thailand’s counter-narcotic strategy is not immune from criticism. One frequently cited issue is the range of health consequences resulting from increased social integration and other counter-narcotic measures. For example, some highland development skeptics argue that the exposure of once-secluded highlanders to lowland prostitution has resulted in the

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22 Ibid., 159-168.
spread of AIDS and other related diseases in the highlands. Though it is certainly a valid concern, it can be associated with the inevitable exposure of the highland population given the nationwide development spillover – rather than being linked to direct development action resulting from specific counter-narcotic measures.

Relating to the health impact on highland communities, there is concern over the structure of demand reduction programs. Specifically, drug addiction is treated merely as a physical illness – discounting the need to assess the psychological and social motivations of drug abuse. Drug abuse, in this case, is not simply restricted to opium and its heroin derivative. Following 2000, Thailand continues to face a narcotics challenge. With a supply market north of the border in Burma, the prevalence of the methamphetamine trade has tempered much of the enthusiasm arising out of Thailand’s counter-narcotic success in suppressing the opium market, especially in the context of domestic consumption. In 2003, it was estimated that there were approximately 3 million regular methamphetamine users – roughly 5% of Thailand’s population.

That same year, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra took steps to address the growing methamphetamine problem amidst mounting pressure. To this end, the


24 Ibid.

government assumed an aggressive enforcement campaign. Within three months of its
declaration, counter-narcotic enforcement activity resulted in 2,500 deaths and was
subsequently criticized over allegations of engagement in extra-judicial executions.²⁶
Shinawatra has since been removed from office following a coup d'état and is currently in
exile after fleeing the country to avoid facing a corruption trial. While Thailand’s
leadership shifts, its narcotic problems persist. As long as the demand for
methamphetamines is consistent, the Thai government will be waging a prolonged
counter-narcotic effort. Unfortunately, it does not help their cause when the major source
of narcotic supply is one they have limited influence over. The Thai-Burmese border
remains a critical challenge so long as it is a transit point for Burmese drugs entering
Thailand and can be infiltrated by rebel groups operating in the area. That the
relationship between the two countries has been a diplomatically fragile one renders the
effort to elicit cooperation for counter-narcotic measures considerably more difficult.

Between 1970 and 2000, Thailand had considerable success in rooting out opium
poppy cultivation through its counter-narcotic efforts. Aided generously by an economic
development boom and a commitment to integration, its long-term perspective and
balanced counter-narcotic measures deserve cautious praise. The Thailand case has not
been a wholesale counter-narcotic success as evidenced by the continuing flow of drugs
within the country and consistent drug consumption levels. The existence of narcotics in
Thailand is indeed spurred by the insecurity and illicit activity beyond its border.

²⁶ Ibid., 120.
Nonetheless, the Thai government will continue to face the task of absorbing threats from regional influence all the while securing its population and economy from narcotic trade elements.

What broad lessons can we draw from Thailand’s past experience and ongoing struggle to suppress narcotic activity within its borders? First, counter-narcotic programs are sustainable when local participation and “buy-in” was obtained. When viable alternatives existed in the highlands, farmers voluntarily engaged with development authorities and were receptive to counter-narcotic programs that they felt catered to their local needs.

Second, punitive measures must operate within the context of a balanced approach that understands the potential blowback effects of public opinion. Eradication was instituted by Thai authorities as a necessary disincentive – but only as a long-term measure determined not to incite local ire. Alternatively, the Thai government dealt a severe setback to its counter-narcotic efforts when then Prime Minister Shinawatra’s aggressive crackdown in 2003 tainted government legitimacy.

Third, physical and economic security is a prerequisite to a sustainable reduction in poppy cultivation that reconciles the interests of farming communities. The destruction of insurgent sanctuaries in the Thai highlands and the integration of highlanders into an economic boom paved the way for viable counter-narcotic programs that reduced community dependence on poppies.
Fourth, narcotic demand reduction programs will prove to be ineffective without a comprehensive and holistic approach that is cognizant of local conditions and underlying factors. Although demand reduction programs staved off opiate use between 1970-2000, the last decade has witnessed an increase in habitual illicit methamphetamine use among Thais.

In the following conclusion, these Thai lessons and previous assessments of U.S.-Afghan strategy are employed to craft a recommendation for the future of counter-narcotic policy in Afghanistan.
CONCLUSION

Poppy cultivation and the production, trafficking and consumption of opium represent a legitimate threat to a myriad of interests. To Afghanistan, the opium industry is a destabilizing illicit trade that undermines the development of a foundation for democratization and state rebuilding. To the South and Central Asian region, it is a criminal enterprise operating with a disregard for the sovereign legitimacy of states. For the international partners involved in the Afghan mission, especially the U.S. with its significant presence on the ground, it is an extension of the insurgency and a funding source for extremists attacking coalition soldiers. There is much at stake in U.S.-Afghanistan counter-narcotic collaboration.

Recent counter-narcotic efforts have won occasional battles but have yet to yield victory in a larger war. Going forward, consolidating recent gains with the goal of neutralizing all facets of Afghanistan’s opium trade requires a fundamental rethinking of policy on strategic and tactical levels. The existing pillar framework provides a baseline upon which to improve and revise policy. The revised approach relies on nuance and flexibility as opposed to generalizations and rigidity. Moreover, it needs to be introduced as a strategy realigned with the long-term goals for development and democratization – in theory and in implementation.

At a strategic level, it is recommended that the joint U.S.-Afghan counter-narcotic effort formally embrace these four overarching principles: 1) security is a precondition to
success, 2) there are no desirable quick-fix strategies,\(^1\) 3) public support and opinion is a crucial constraint, 4) it is imperative to adopt a long-term scope that accommodates an effort to preserve the foundational integrity for reliable governance structures, legitimate rule of law and viable economic opportunities.

Bearing in mind these principles, the following tactical-level policies are recommended for implementation in the security, economic, governance and legal sectors.

**Security**

- Increased military troop presence in southern and eastern Afghanistan – including Afghan security forces and NATO coalition troops; encourage more NATO countries to engage in counter-narcotic missions in southern Afghanistan in lieu of, or as a segue to, direct combat activity
- Mobilize security forces, including NATO soldiers and U.S. Special Forces, to disrupt trafficking networks and heroin production laboratories
- Secure major roadways connecting vulnerable farming communities to markets with a specialized road patrol forces

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\(^1\) Legalization of poppy cultivation for licit opiate production is one proposal cited in recent years. It is not recommended for implementation in Afghanistan due to the lack of regulatory infrastructure and institutions required to manage it, an oversupplied medicinal opiate market driven by the inability of opiate demanding countries to absorb medicine safely, and the perverse effect of increased economic dependence on poppies as a result of poppy crop subsidization.
• Increase intelligence-gathering capabilities to map the narcotic trade across provinces

• Increase security force presence on Afghanistan-Pakistan border and provide expedited training for counter-trafficking reconnaissance

• Encourage Afghanistan-Pakistan reconciliation regarding Durand border dispute; formal recognition of border by Afghanistan will increase incentives for both sides to address the insecurity emanating from the border region

Economic

• Elicit greater cooperation and participation from local leaders in planning and implementation of alternative livelihood and other counter-narcotic programs

• Closely monitor coping habits of farmers and non-farmers once engaged in the opium trade in designated “poppy-free” provinces to map their behavior over the course of multiple planting seasons

• Encourage direct foreign investment into relatively secure provinces adjacent to poppy-cultivating provinces to provide potential labor opportunities

• Create a more accountable and transparent process to absorb and audit foreign aid funneled to local development projects

• Recruit and train individuals from poppy-cultivating provinces to compete for development project employment

• Establish a commission to renew studies investigating drug use and its underlying conditions
Governance

- Conduct thorough joint U.S.-Afghan investigations into charges of corruption and collusion in the narcotics trade; publicize corruption cases involving narcotics
- Regain control of basic governance services conducted by semi-autonomous insurgent groups in southern provinces
- Design a civil service academy that draws young recruits from at-risk, poppy-producing provinces with guaranteed scholarships in exchange for training and civil service assignments in counter-narcotic programs
- Investigate financial records and assets of officials implicated in narcotic trade activities
- Since 75% of the funding generated from the narcotic trade flows to non-farmers, counter-narcotic programs targeted at non-farming stakeholders should be publicized and communicated in a robust manner to all communities
- Incorporate a diverse set of metrics in assessing counter-narcotic efforts aside from the standard measure of “poppy-free” provinces and eradication figures; for instance, include economic indicators that quantify infrastructure development in roads that are safe and traversable

Rule of Law

- Adopt a formal extradition treaty between U.S. and Afghanistan; transfer high-profile narcotic trafficking cases to the U.S. in the short-term while
simultaneously building indigenous capacity to prosecute those cases within the Afghan justice system in the long-run

- Investigate the flow of chemical precursors necessary for drug production; elicit cooperation from companies shipping these chemicals in Asia
- Increase U.S.-Afghan private-public partnership for justice sector reform; expedite training for prosecutors and narcotic enforcement investigators through DOJ and DEA programs
- Structure eradication programs with greater transparency and objectivity; remove potential conflicts of interest and monitor potential opportunities for coercion
- Elicit cooperation from informal financial hubs (e.g. Dubai) in the area of investigating and understanding narcotic trade financing schemes and networks

It is vital that counter-narcotic strategy be viewed in such a comprehensive policy context. These tactical revisions, supported by the aforementioned strategic considerations, ensure that counter-narcotic efforts are long-term in scope, balanced in approach, and perceived as trustworthy and legitimate in implementation. The importance of these dimensions cannot be underestimated in the context of a development and democratization process in Afghanistan. To do so would dangerously place an important ally, a critical region and the strategic interests of the U.S. in great peril.
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